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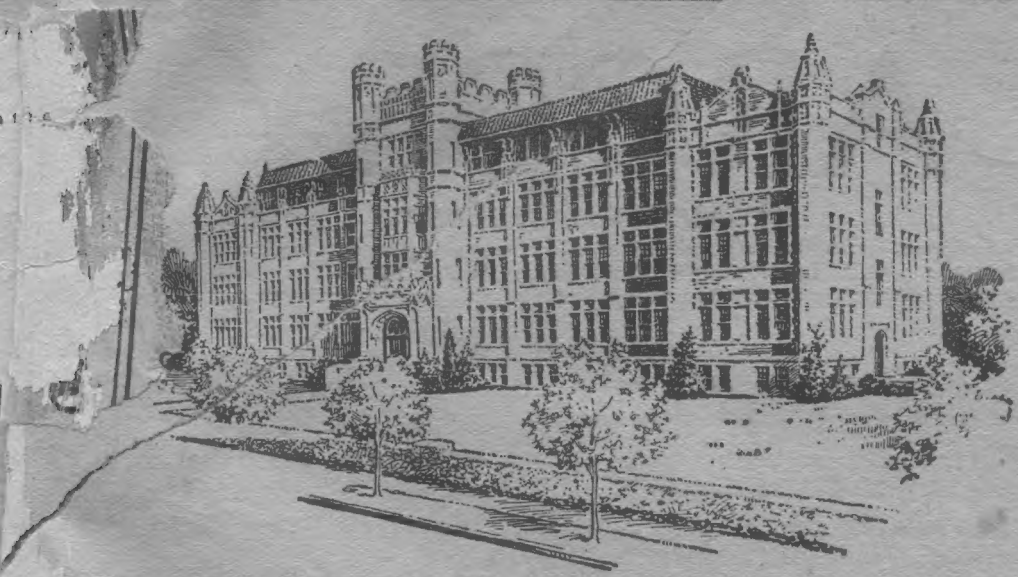

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VOLUME 211 | SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 1930 | NUMBER 2

The Afghans studied their prey for a moment

The City of Japheth

John Norcross, War Lord of a western China city, goes adventuring in search of a lost city in the mountains of Turkestan

By W. WIRT

Author of "Swords are Out!" "Draw a Gun!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

MEN OF MILLIONS.

"I WANT to go there, Landess," repeated the old man, getting up from the deep cushioned chair in the richly furnished library of Henry Landess, third richest man in the world. The library, with its shelves filled with almost priceless manuscripts and books, was on the third floor of the massive stone house on Fifth Avenue, overlooking Central Park in New York.

The old Hebrew went to one of the windows and stood, staring at the myriad lights twinkling across the dark green. For all the seventy years his body carried, it was slim and erect; and his face, smooth-shaven, looked

like the pictures seen in the art galleries of the Patriarchs in the time of Christ. Even the immaculate evening clothes did not dissipate that impression.

"I must go," he continued, in a moment or so, coming back and beginning to pace up and down in front of the immense flat-topped, glass-covered mahogany desk. "Oh, God of Abraham, I must go, Henry! See, twice I have started, only to be turned back. The men that I hired to take me in were cowards that turned and ran. Look!" And he pulled up his sleeve.

"See the scars where those cowards bound me and carried me back to what they said was safety. Safety! When I wanted to go on until— Once through India, and once through China did I try, only to be driven back like a dog! I am like a man possessed by devils! Money? What good is it? Millions I have, as you have, Henry; and yet—and yet—what good? What good? I want to go there and die among the sacred things. Where I can see and touch them. It is foolish, yes, and men would call me crazy; but I want to go. I—want—to—go, Henry."

"Sit down once more, Isaac," said Landess, gently. "You are not crazy." Landess was old, as old as Isaac Nathan. He was slim, frail, with snow-white hair, but his eyes were young and shone with the unquenchable spirit of great adventure that would light them until they closed forever.

"Why shouldn't you want to go and spend your last days among the things you hold sacred? Sit down and rest for a moment that brilliant brain that has planned calmly and coolly for so many years. You can go there, Isaac. Don't you see that in your eagerness, you have rushed headlong into certain defeat?"

Isaac Nathan sat down, a smile now on his tight old lips and in his still keen eyes.

"That is so, Henry," he answered quietly. "I have been like a young lover rushing blindly to meet his dear one. I should have come to you before. Together you and I will plan—as we used to do in the old days when we fought them all. Do you remember the day that we cornered cotton? Then we had a fight, didn't we, Henry? Then my brain could plan, and execute. And now—and now? Twice I have been turned back because the men I paid were—"

"Steady!" interrupted Landess. "Get back, Nathan! It is the day of the corner—they are calling on us for millions in gold! You must help me get them. Where? Stop thinking of what has gone wrong. It is water under the bridge. Now help me plan this thing. Are you a child that must be taken by the hand—or are you Isaac Nathan, the man who for years stood side by side with Henry Landess and fought them all? Answer me, so that I may know how to proceed."

NATHAN straightened up in his chair, and the hand that he held palm down across the table was as steady as steel.

"I am Isaac Nathan," he said, simply. "Failure is forgotten. You have a plan, Henry?"

"Yes. I know a man who will take you where you want to go, Isaac. I do not say that he *may* be able to, or that perhaps he can. I say that this man, if he chooses, and if you live up to that time, can put you among the things that are sacred to you."

"Henry, if he can (and I know that when you say he can, he can), I will give him—but what is money to—"

Whatever he wants, he may have, that is all."

"Sit back and rest, Isaac. In two days, you and I will go and ask Captain John Norcross to take you to the sacred things. My yacht is in commission. Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, Henry, I am ready. There is no one left now of my family, to bid good-by. Miriam awaits me behind some bright star; I would start to her from this place I want to go. Yes, I am ready."

"We will go then, in two days," and Landess smiled at Nathan, a gentle, understanding smile which Nathan returned. The two men, both rich beyond the possibility of even estimating their wealth, more than powerful because of their millions in every civilized country and a few uncivilized, looked deep into each other's eyes and saw there what they had always seen in times of stress or peace, partnership.

"This Captain Norcross," inquired Nathan; "who and what is he, Henry?"

"He is a Mississippian, a gentleman by birth and breeding. A captain in the regular army, commanding colored troops. He rated higher during the war and afterward resigned the service to become a special agent, because he loves action. He is the man that secured the Alveraz emeralds for Webb; and for me he fought his way up through Afghanistan to a Chinese city on its eastern border, and there got for me something that is priceless. I would be ashamed to tell you how many millions it cost me to buy it from the Greek church."

"You bought it from the church? I thought you said that this Captain Norcross got it for you?"

"He did; but in honor, I had to turn it over to the church. I bought it from the Patriarch in Athens. Captain Norcross outwitted Carlton's agent, outfought savage tribes and Chinese War Lords, put a Manchu princess on her throne, and brought me what I wanted. As little Ch'enyaun, the Manchu princess and War Lord of Ningyuan said," Landess added with a smile, "'My honorable elder brother fulfilled his trust.' I can only say, Isaac, that I love him in the place of the son that was not given me; and if I wanted to get anything in the world, or wanted to go anywhere, I would ask Captain Norcross to get it for me or take me there."

"You can say no more, Henry," answered Nathan, his eyes shining. "Where is he?"

"At the moment, in Pekin. I do not think he has gone back to Ningyuan. Wait, I will make sure." Landess pressed a button on the desk. A manservant came in.

"Give Mr. Richards my compliments and ask him to join us here, please," Landess ordered. A moment later a young man, also in evening clothes, entered. He was a typical New York executive, with his calm, cold young face, keen eyes, and tight lips; he was Landess's first secretary.

"You know Mr. Nathan, Mr. Richards." It was a statement, not a question and Richards bowed. "Yes, sir."

"Captain John Norcross was in Pekin ten days ago. Locate him, please, and if still there, put him in communication with me here. Use the P. A. cable."

"Yes, sir," Richards bowed once more and went out. Inside of five minutes, the great power of millions began to function smoothly across the continent, across the Pacific, by wire, cable and wireless. It was "Clear for

Landess," and those three words pushed everything to one side.

"IF he is there, Henry," asked Nathan, after Richards went out, "what then?"

"Why, then, Isaac, you and I will go there and tell him what you want; and he will do it, for me."

"Can we, in any way, get anything for him before we go, to save time? Equipment, men, whatever he needs?" The brilliant brain of Isaac Nathan was working now.

Landess smiled. "I think that Captain Norcross will have all that is necessary, Isaac. After he came home, most of his colored troopers stayed over there and fought for the Princess Ch'enyaun and her husband, the Manchu noble T'ang Wang. About one hundred and fifty of them. They had plenty of the equipment," here Landess smiled, "that Captain Norcross carries with him. See, Isaac, wherever this Captain Norcross goes, he is strong enough to—what did he say?—oh, yes: strong enough to shoot his way in. His men served under him on the border and in France and love him and follow him anywhere. Isaac, those are fighting men pure and simple, experts with revolvers, rifles or machine guns. Captain Norcross smiles and says they are a 'bunch of no-'count scoundrels.'" Landess leaned back in his chair. "But he loves them just the same."

"But—I started in with five hundred men the first time and—"

"Not this kind of men, Isaac. You had men who went with you for hire. Men who cared neither for you nor for what you sought. Time-servers, that is all. Captain Norcross's men—his hundred fifty—are worth many thousand of such. They go with him because he is 'de Capt'n'; and that is very different. Do not worry about it, Isaac. If he will start with you, you will arrive, as Corporal Delicate Moss says, 'wid bells on.'" Landess chuckled as the memory of the immense corporal came to him.

"Besides, Isaac," he confessed, "after Captain Norcross went back to straighten out the men he left behind, and to help the Princess Ch'enyaun and T'ang Wang in a little war, I sent him four shiploads of, shall I say, equipment, of various kinds for the city he is building."

Nathan smiled. He knew full well how Landess, with legislators and high officials at his command the world over, could ship anything he wanted, at any time and to any place.

"If he is building a city, Henry, it may be that he will not want to take me."

Landess shook his head. "No, Nathan. No matter what he is doing, if I ask him, he will take you. He is no man of mine, you understand; no man owns him. But—he loves me, as I love him. He is as a son to me."

It was at three o'clock in the morning that Richards entered the library.

"Captain Norcross's compliments to Mr. Landess. He awaits orders."

"Very good, Richards. Tell him that I leave for Pekin in two days."

And an hour later:

"Captain Norcross will await the arrival of Mr. Landess at the palace of the Mandarin Kungchang."

CHAPTER II.

THE LOST TRIBES.

CAPTAIN JOHN NORCROSS, lean-flanked, broad-shouldered, with thin, tanned, serious face and calm blue eyes, sat in the scented

gardens of the Mandarin Kungchang. He was about thirty-two.

With him sat T'ang Wang, Manchu noble of the pure blood, who wore on his hat an embroidered unicorn with a girdle clasp of jade set in rubies—the insignia of a mandarin of the first military class. He had been leader of swordsmen for Ch'enyaun.

The two cities Ningyuan and Taiyaun in Chinese Turkestan, five hundred thousand people and a hundred square miles of territory rendered unquestioned obedience to the dainty little Manchu girl, descended in unbroken lineage from the Chieftain Nurhachu of the Long White Mountain. Her cities commanded the passes through the great Thian Shan range from Siberia and Russian Turkestan.

Norcross had aided her in regaining her city of Ningyuan a year before, when she had been driven from it by her uncle who thought to seize the power.

He had seated her once more on the throne of her ancestors and had acted as her "honorable elder brother" when she married T'ang Wang. Now T'ang Wang was governor of all the province of Kuen Lun; and he had awaited the coming of Landess with his "elder brother" Norcross.

Across the mother-of-pearl inlaid table sat Landess and Isaac Nathan.

It was easy to see that Nathan felt Norcross could bring him to his heart's desire. He sat straight, his eyes holding those of Norcross. No longer was he uncertain; now he was the man who had fought for and won countless millions. He sensed that Norcross would understand him and his longing.

"Captain Norcross, I do not know of what faith you are or whether you have even read the Bible; but it may be that you remember this: 'And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with a high hand.'" Nathan looked inquiringly.

"Well, suh," Norcross answered with a smile, "my people have been Presbyterians for a right smart length of time, I reckon. I did go to Sunday-school for a little while back yonder in Natchez, Mississippi, but I don't remember too much about it. That's something about the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, isn't it?"

"That is correct, Captain. Do you remember this: 'And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord'?"

"No, suh. I don't reckon I do, Mr. Nathan."

Nathan smiled. "It is not to be expected that you would, Captain Norcross. Well, at that time, just before the Lord commanded Moses to stretch forth his hand over the sea and cause the waters to be divided so that the children of Israel could walk on dry land, one of the captains of Israel rebelled against Moses, saying, 'Hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?' And that captain, with his family, the tens of families and the hundreds, seized on many of the sacred things of the temples that had been brought with them and left the camp of the children of Israel that night, under cover of the darkness.

"This captain, who was strong in fighting men, took many sacred things with him. He took the Ark of the Covenant; and with it, Captain Norcross, I personally believe he took also the Scroll of the Mosaic Laws, the pot

of manna, Aaron's Rod that budded and—and— But I see that these things mean nothing to you, Captain Norcross. This captain, whose name was Japheth, led his people away from Moses, followed and harried by a strong detachment of the troops of Pharaoh, who hung on like hungry wolves, met always by the good swords of the shepherds. Japheth led his people for three thousand miles before they came to the land they settled. How long it took, that I do not know.... Is it believable, Captain?"

"Yes, suh," answered Norcross.

"HE led them finally up beyond Chinese Turkestan. What it was called then, I do not know. In the Kuen Lun range of mountains he built a city. I see by your eyes that you are wondering how I know this. For ten, yes, for fifteen years I have been collecting evidence; here and there, a scrap now and then from all over the world. I know that the city is there."

"It is right probable he did build him a city, Mr. Nathan. But that range is beyond even the Thian Shan. Have you ever heard of a city up there, T'ang Wang?"

"Yes, honorable elder brother. In Ningyuan, when I was still in the school of swordsmen, there were rumors that there was a city in the Kuen Lun."

"That is it!" cried Nathan, his face illuminated with an inner fire. "I want to go there, Captain. To this day, the descendants of Japheth live there."

"Why," said Norcross, a little surprised, "that ought to be right easy, Mr. Nathan. They must have some contact with the Chinese or the Tartars or Russians."

"They have had contact with no one, those thousands of Israel," said Nathan grimly. "Their city is a walled one and they hold the land for a long ways surrounding it, with the sword. No man has ever won within the city. It is the only city in the world to-day that is wholly of the pure Hebrew. They have been that since the days of Moses."

"They must be fighting men," said Norcross with a smile, "to have held their city that way against all comers for thousands of years. You know something—anything—of the city, Mr. Nathan?"

"Three times," answered Nathan, "have men been driven from the city to die; and once, a woman. She was found by the Chinese, she and her baby. They told of the city, and died. My agents have been active for years, Captain. If I could only get there I—I think they would let me in. I am old now; and I think I have reverted back to my people—back to the days when the Hebrews were a people... I want to go there and die where they still are. Will you take me there, Captain Norcross?"

"If you will, John," said Landess, softly, "it will mean much to me. Isaac Nathan has been as a brother to me, always."

"I don't quite get it, I reckon," answered Norcross. "Given that the city is there—and that they keep all outsiders from coming in—why haven't you organized a strong enough outfit to go in as far as their lines?"

"I tried to. Twice," interrupted Nathan. "The men that I hired deserted me. They were cowards who thought only of their own safety and—" His tone was growing shrill.

"Steady, Isaac," broke in the soft, firm voice of Landess. "Water under

the bridge, remember. Captain Norcross can take you to the lines. Yes, and into the heart of the city if you wish. I tell you that; I, Henry Landess, who have never told you false."

"That is right, Henry," answered Nathan, sitting back once more.

"Well, suh," said Norcross, "I can sure try, anyway. Let's get it straight. You want to be taken to a city that you say is in Chinese Turkestan, in the Kuen Lun range. After we get there, what then?"

"Why, then, Captain Norcross, I will ask them to let me come in and stay," answered Nathan, simply.

"And if the city isn't there, or has been destroyed, or you find the stories about their being strictly Hebrew are false?"

"Why, then, I think that—that I will die. If that is the case, will you bury me up there in the mountains, Captain, so that I may look at the city that was once Japheth?"

"I hope we won't have to," answered Norcross gently. He had looked deep into the soul of the Hebrew patriarch sitting there, and understood. "But if we do, we will obey your orders, Mr. Nathan."

"Then you will take me there?" Nathan leaned forward.

"Yes, suh, we will sure take you there," answered Norcross.

"I will go with you, Isaac," said Landess, "at least as far as the city that John has built. Once before I was invited by the Princess Ch'enyaun to come to Ningyuan, and rest."

"When can we start?" asked Nathan, rising.

"To-day, if you wish. Our men await us just over the border of India at Gilgit."

"You do not need to make any preparations, Captain?" asked Nathan in surprise, as Norcross and T'ang Wang rose.

"No, suh," answered Norcross, with a smile. "Not until we reach Ningyuan. I know that Mr. Landess can hurry our passage through India to the border. Once there we have enough men to go through. Are your affairs attended to, T'ang Wang?"

"Yes, elder brother," answered the Manchu noble, governor of a province. "If they were not, they would be put aside until we have placed the friend of the War Lord of America in the heart of his city, as the War Lord, through you, placed the Princess Ch'enyaun in her city." And the Manchu, of a race that never forgets a debt of gratitude or of injury, bowed to Henry Landess, of New York.

CHAPTER III.

INTO CHINA—AND PERIL.

ISAAC NATHAN stood with Landess, Norcross and T'ang Wang on a little knoll, some ten miles beyond the border of India from Gilgit. In front of them loomed the massive Karakoram mountains of Chinese Turkestan.

Past the knoll there marched a compact little column of big colored men dressed in army khaki, the non-commissioned officers with the yellow rating stripes of the cavalry. Leading them was a stockily-built colored man who wore on his tunic the one bar of a second lieutenant. Fifty men in the ranks, twelve mules loaded with ammunition, six with machine guns, six more with rations.

The men carried heavy order marching equipment, Springfield rifles and bayonets; Colt .45 revolvers, holstered, swung from full cartridge belts at the

proper "riders" angle. They may have been infantry at the moment, but they never forgot for a moment that they were "Troop B of the Thirty-first."

Five hundred of T'ang Wang's swordsmen had already gone into the hills as vanguard, and following the column were five hundred more of the best swordsmen in all China.

It was a hard-boiled, efficient-looking outfit that swung easily past; and it was just as hard-boiled and efficient as it looked, and it may be quite a little more. The colored men had served under Norcross in the regular army on the Mexican border and in France, and had more than willingly come with him to Chinese Turkestan.

They were simon-pure fighting men, who had absolute confidence that "dis outfit can whup de world." They loved Norcross as "de Capt'n," and any one of them would have cheerfully crawled through hell naked for him. Now, as they passed the knoll, Corporal Happy Combes said to the Mobile Kid, on his left: "Ain't dat de gent'mum dat meets us heah de first time us starts back?"

"Yes, suh, dat's de one, Happy. Dat gent'mum name is Landess. Ah nevah seed de odder gent'mum befo'."

"Maybe-so on de way back us gits de chance to show 'em whut reg'lars can do," offered Corporal Combes, hopefully.

"Dem's both fightin' gent'mums," announced Buck Foster, beside the Mobile Kid.

"How come you know dat, Buck? You only got you a little bitty squint at dem when us passed," demanded Happy Combes, with a grin that showed two rows of firm white teeth.

"Dat's all Ah need, boy," answered Buck, who had been raised on the old Dinwiddie plantation in Kentucky. "Ah knows quality folks when Ah sees dem; an' Ah knows fightin' gent'mum de same. Dem gent'mum ain't like de Capt'n, but they is quality folks an' fightin' folks just de same."

"Listen to de chattah of dat ape," said a voice from the next file. "Only kind of folks dat boy knows is de kind whut brings him in to say: 'Good morning, judge, please suh.'"

"Ain't dat de truf! An' den he knows dat de ol' judge he say: 'Ninety dollars an' a hundred and eighty days, boy.'" Another man took it up; and the lines, as far as they heard him, laughed.

There were few men there who had not qualified for the Distinguished Marksman badge, and all of them could make a machine gun or rifle spit out a steel-jacketed death, as well as handle a Colt .45. They were a happy-go-lucky outfit, as colored troops are when under officers they love; and they were also a fighting outfit. They fought Chinese, Cossacks, Zulus and whatever else got in their way, with pleased grins on their black faces; and they died the same way.

NATHAN watched them file by, his eyes shining. He looked at them and then at the lean, calm-eyed man standing beside him who commanded them. If his men loved Norcross, Nathan could tell by the look in the blue eyes that Norcross loved them also.

"Are these all of your men, John?"

Nathan had dropped the more formal "Captain Norcross" long before they had crossed India.

"No, suh," answered Norcross, as they started to walk along after the column, ahead of T'ang Wang's rear guard of swordsmen. "I have two hundred and fifty more at Ningyuan.

After I came back to help the Princess Ch'enyaun and T'ang Wang fight off a Chinese and Cossack attack, I decided to stay, for several reasons—one of which you will meet in Ningyuan. I lost quite a few men then and later I sent back a few of them as a recruiting party to the States; and that brought my outfit up to its present strength. Most of the men have served in Troop B of the Thirty-first Cavalry at various times and the rest had been in other troops of my squadron. And Mr. Landess here," he smiled at the white-haired man walking beside him, "has sent me everything from airplanes to trench mortars, I reckon."

"Then, when we get to Ningyuan, how long will it be until we can start for—for my city in the hills?"

"The day after we arrive," answered Norcross, gently. "Ningyuan is on the way to your city, Mr. Nathan. You have already started."

Nathan walked along for a few minutes, silently, then looked up and smiled. "Do you know, my friends, I feel absolutely at rest and at peace for the first time in many years. You have not failed me, Henry; and I know that you will take me to my city, John."

The column went steadily forward. When Landess and Nathan got tired of walking there were mules to ride, the big colored men taking the burden of machine guns or ammunition cheerfully on their brawny backs.

The camps were made in pleasant places, and both Landess and Nathan slept soundly under warm blankets. The swordsmen were around the camp in a far-flung circle with four machine gun detachments of the colored men at each compass point to back them up, for they were in no man's land.

Neither Norcross nor T'ang Wang, experienced fighting men that they were, took any chances whatsoever. It was Chinese territory, but a fighting ground for Afghans, Tartars, Chinese, with not a few Russians and masterless men of all breeds thrown in for good measure. The revolution in Afghanistan, the continual one in China, the ever-heaving unrest in Russia and India, had thrown a hard mixture in there. It was no man's land to the *n*th degree, and the Chinese War Lords there held what they had by force of arms alone. There was no law, except that which was made and enforced by steel or lead.

The column moved steadily through the hills toward Ningyuan. Corporal Combes's wish that something would happen so that the "reg'lars" could do some showing, was not fulfilled.

On the tenth morning, as Norcross, Landess, and Nathan sat at breakfast, Norcross pointed to a snow-tipped peak far ahead.

"Mr. Nathan, do you see that peak ahead and on the right a little? Just below it is the pass that leads to Ningyuan. To-morrow night we will camp there and the next night we will be in Ningyuan."

Nathan put down his coffee cup and smiled. "Henry, and John, neither of you can know how happy I am. I know that soon I will be in the place of rest and quiet, among the sacred things."

A little later the bugle blew "Troop mount," and then "Forward march." Highnote, the bugler, being a cavalryman, disdained all calls but those of the cavalry; and mounted or not, he used them.

THE Afghan Khan watched the proceedings from an aerie on top of one of the hills. His keen eyes picked up details that most men would have needed field glasses to find.

He was far above and outside the circle of swordsmen; though if he had been inside it would not have made his fierce old fighting heart beat a stroke faster.

He turned to the three men who lay beside him. Two of them were his kinsmen, the third a fat, greasy-looking Persian. The grime on that one's broad face could not hide the fact that he was desperately afraid; and he had good cause. To be alone in the hills with three Afghans was about the same as being in a den with three tigers.

His lust for gain had driven him as far as Zaman Khan's headquarters with his story of rich pickings; but he had not figured on going farther. He went, just the same; and now, as he lay alongside, he had no special reason for doubting that once Zaman Khan got the information he wanted there would be a dead Persian in the hills shortly after.

The Persian had intended to tell what he knew, make a dicker for part of the loot, and scurry back to India. There he would wait, trusting that Zaman Khan would come through with at least five per cent of what he should promise. But after Zaman Khan had listened he had ordered the Persian on a horse.

"Ho!" grunted Zaman Khan. "They form like well-trained troops. By the beard of the Prophet! If it were not for those sons of unspeakable mothers, the Manchu swordsmen who swarm like flies around honey, I would cut him out now with what men I have. There are only a few of the black men. Look, mongrel of Persia, and tell me which of the white men is he who owns all the gold."

The Persian inched his way gingerly to the rim and looked over, screwing up his eyes in an effort to see more plainly. He knew it was up to him to point out Nathan and be quick about it also. Any show of hesitation would be classed as double dealing by the fierce, suspicious Afghans, themselves past grand masters at the art. And the slightest shade of an idea like that coming to them would result instantly in a drawn sword or dagger, which would be used just as promptly.

"Make haste," commanded Zaman Khan. "We must ride far to gather the clans. Of what good are your eyes if you cannot even see at this short distance? Better that they be plucked from your head and hung up for the ravens to pick at."

At this by no means idle threat, the Persian pointed. "That one—walking toward the little tent in front. That is Nathan, who has most of the gold and jewels of his country."

The Persian had been one of the men hired by Nathan on one of his previous tries, and had been tipped by a friend who had seen the column leave the Indian border that Nathan was going into the hills again. The Persian had tried to frame a kidnaping on the earlier trip, but had not had time. That was the reason he had come to Zaman Khan.

The Afghans studied the man pointed out for a moment or so with their camera-like eyes, taking in every detail of his appearance. Then Zaman Khan arose, after easing back from the rim over which they had been looking down into the valley.

"It may be," he said, with an evil smile, "that the Prophet Mohammed, who rests in the bosom of God, will delegate me to relieve the infidel dog of the burden of carrying so much wealth. Ride, you, to Adalis! You, to the Saddosai! Gather all who ride under my standard. We meet at the

Peak of the Gods. Ride and pass my word, which is this: Laggards shall not join in the loot. Say that I, Zaman Khan, swear it by the sacred stone at Mecca. To horse, kinsmen!"

The Persian decided, as he rode beside Zaman Khan, that if he got the chance he also would keep right on riding—until he had put the border of India between him and the Afghans, share or no share.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF FOR THE KUEN LUN.

THE Manchu princess Ch'enyaun sat in one of the smaller audience chambers in the palace of her forefathers at Ningyuan. With her, around the polished teakwood table, sat the lovely wife of Captain John Norcross, who a year before had been the Magyar Lady Anna Guilai; Nathan, Landess, Norcross and T'ang Wang.

The proud little Manchu princess, whose ancestors had led the Manchus straight through China to the Peacock throne, had met Landess before. As Nathan was presented to her, the velvety black eyes had looked deep, to see the white shining spirit in the frail old body.

"You are welcome to my city of Ningyuan," Ch'enyaun had said softly, as she held out her slender little hand that could also close around a sword hilt with a grip of steel, "Not only because you are the friend of the War Lord Landess, but because you are—" Her English, taught her by Norcross and by T'ang Wang, who had spent four years in England, did not permit her to say exactly what she wished to say; so she finished the sentence—"because you are *you*."

Nathan had smiled gently at the upturned lovely little face and answered: "I am glad to be here, O mighty ruler of cities, and also glad to have you welcome me, because you are what you are."

She had smiled delightedly; and now she was sitting beside Nathan, looking like some gorgeous little butterfly in her bright silken robes that blazed with priceless jewels.

With Anna Norcross, she had heard Nathan tell of the legendary city and of his longings to reach there. He had told it simply and from his heart. Long before he had finished, both of the beautiful women were leaning forward, their eyes shining.

Both of them had been raised in a hard school; Anna by the Altai Mountain Tartars, of which her father had been *haduagy* or chief captain, although by birth a Magyar; and the princess Ch'enyaun, raised in the Manchu code. Both had brave fighting hearts that beat true in their exquisite bodies.

It was a far call from Isaac Nathan, who had fought his way up to millions in New York, to the princess Ch'enyaun and to Captain John Norcross's wife, descended from kings and conquerors of a thousand years ago. But Nathan's race was as pure-blooded, and their hearts reached across the distance to his. As he told of his tragic failures to reach his goal, Anna Norcross leaned across the pearl-inlaid table and patted one of the hands he had clenched as he lived over the days when he had been driven back.

"You must not think of it any more. My Lord John will take you to the city. And if you do not want to stay there, once you have found it, come to our city of Guilai on the mountain of Su. There you will find rest and peace."

Nathan smiled and relaxed. "That I will do; but I know, somehow, the city is there."

A palace officer came to the entrance and bowed. "You have my permission to enter, Ming Li," Ch'enyaun said.

The officer advanced to within ten feet of the table and bowed again before he spoke. "The people you summoned have arrived and await your pleasure, O War Lord of many swordsmen and cities."

"You will send them in one by one, the eldest first." As the officer bowed and backed out of the room, Ch'enyaun explained. "They are people from Taiyaun and the country as well as those in Ningyuan, who know or have heard the—I do not know the English word, elder brother."

"I reckon the word you want is 'legend'; that means story or tale of old, Ch'enyaun," Norcross answered.

"Yes, that is it. These people have heard legends of the city in the Kuen Lun range. T'ang Wang, you question them, and the Lady Anna and I will translate for the War Lord Landess and Mr. Nathan."

"And also for your elder brother," added Norcross. "My Chinese is limited to about six words."

"As was my English, John," Anna said, as her hand sought and found his, "until you taught me."

THE first man in, an old goldworker, couldn't remember much; and the fact that he was in the presence of Ch'enyaun and the foreign lords, did not help his memory very much. But T'ang Wang, his grim young face gentle for all its sword scars, as gentle as it always was when dealing with the people, led the old man slowly along. The people knew and loved the just, calm, Manchu leader of swords; and the old man finally told all he knew.

It wasn't much. His father's father had been told by his grandmother that once her father was hunting in the Kuen Lun. In trailing a wounded snow leopard he had climbed one of the high mountains and there from the crest he had looked down on a walled city which seemed to be built as a square with four mountains as the corners. He could see great temples and massive stone buildings, and thought he could see the gates in the wall.

Then, as he looked, he was confronted with men who bore swords and spears, who carried round shields of some shining metal. He knew they were not Chinese, or Tartars or Uzbegs. The leader strode forward, giving some order in a strange tongue. The hunter, seeing an opening, turned and fled and the men had cast spears at him.

"You say that your ancestor, who doubtless is at present on high receiving the honor he deserved as a mighty hunter," T'ang Wang asked, as the old man came to a halt in his wandering speech, "hunted in the Kuen Lun, O venerable grandfather of swordsmen? It has come to my mind that your grandson, Tzu Chen, is one of the brightest scholars in the school of swordsmen."

The old man smiled at the compliment and became more at ease. "That is true, O mighty leader of swords. The family of Chen has resided in the Kuen Lun since the days of the Duke Chow. My father's father was the first to leave the hills. He came here to Ningyuan in the reign of Prince Chieh-ni, the ancestor of the resplendent princess," here he bowed low to Ch'enyaun, "who now rules the world."

"Where in Kuen Lun did your family of Chen live?"

"At the foot of the great Mountain of the Lower Gods, near K'uang."

"He hunted then around the Mountain of the Lower Gods?"

"Yes, O mighty swordsman of the Manchu; and far afield. For days he would travel in search of game. The house of Chen were mighty hunters."

The old man was dismissed with a present and the next called. But to what his story gave, the rest of the tales did not add anything more tangible. It was a mass of vague fable and myth, interwoven with stories of the gods. About all that they definitely agreed upon was that somewhere in the Kuen Lun there was a city of some kind. Nathan, listened eagerly, offering questions to be asked, but at the finish, Norcross and T'ang Wang looked at each other. Nathan caught the look and sighed. "You doubt it?"

Norcross smiled. "I do not think that there is the slightest doubt, Mr. Nathan, that somewhere in the Kuen Lun range there is a city. But I do not think that we are any nearer to it at the moment because of the stories we have heard. I think the best thing we can do is to start for there and try to pick up information as we go."

"I will send all my hunters out," Ch'enyaun announced, "and all the country people that can be spared. With the men of my Lord John can go my swordsmen, who are also hunters. Now, you must rest in my gardens, you and the Lord Landess, while my Lord T'ang Wang and my honorable elder brother make ready."

"YALLER" COUDRAY, who received his nickname on account of his color and in no way on account of his nerve, which was chilled steel, made an important announcement the next morning, after Norcross had finished an inspection of all men and equipment. The big negroes stood in the four-pointed star formation with the machine guns at each point, the one- and two-pound rapid-firers, between the points. First Lieutenant Coudray had been Norcross's first sergeant in the regulars.

As Norcross walked back toward the palace, Courdray ordered, "At ease. Dere will be one hundred and fifty men detailed to go wid de Capt'n into de mountains and find a place dat Misto' Nathan wants to git to. Ah goes wid de party. De rest of B Troop, stays heah and at Guilai. Half of de machine gun squads go and half of de rapid-fiah section."

From the ranks came an immediate response to this announcement.

"Us goes, Skinnay."

"Yo' stay home, Slewfoot. Yoah wife don't let yo' ramble round after dark."

"Doggone! Maybe-so us meets some mo' of dem Cussacks!"

"You ain't goin', boy. You is too pigeon-toed to climb dem hills. Ah takes de gun an' tends to de mattah."

"Yaller — Ah means, Lieutenant Coudray! Don't me an' de Mobile Kid go wid de—"

"'Tenshun!" shouted Yaller. "Mah goodness, does yo' apes keep up dat chattah, Ah goes by mahself. Half goes an' half stays. All dem what has extra duty to work off, stays. Dat 'll teach 'em to obey ohdahs 'bout keepin' clean 'quipment. What we does is dis. Us goes to de barracks an' Sergeant Deacon Yancey deals de cards. Two by two. High man goes an' low man stays. Ace high. Dismiss."

This method of deciding a delicate question appealed very much to the big

colored men, and as they ran toward the barracks, several of them tried to get near Yancey with suggestions that when their turn came he deal from the bottom of the deck.

CHAPTER V.

AFGHANS CHARGE.

ONE of the machine gunners sat up and rubbed his eyes, then looked about the outpost, which lay just within the circle of swordsmen surrounding the camp. It was at the foot of one of the mountains in the Kuen Lun range.

He looked over at the orderly camp, the tents inside the star formation, machine guns and rapid-fire guns in place at the points, the men sleeping in their blankets along the lines. He could see the smoke curling up from the stovepipe in the cook tent.

"What's de mattah wid High-note?" he grumbled. "Ain't up yet to toot dat blame horn! Dat nigger gittin' mo' an' mo' ornery each an' every day. Ah sees de smoke an' Ah smells de coffee. Dat black no-'count scound—"

"You sees an' you heahs, does you?" rumbled Squint-eye Mears, who lay sprawled out at full length, using his arm for a pillow. "Well, iffen you doesn't hush dat bull-bellowin', endurin' de time dat Ah gits mah beauty sleep, you *feels*, big boy. An' what you feels is mah fist on yoah jaw."

"Does yo' try to gimme dat feelin' thing an' Ah finds hit out," answered Skinnay Martin, promptly, "right af'tah dat, yo' wakes up hearin' de nurse say: 'take dis, Misto' Squint-eye!' Doggone! One of the gent-mum am waitin' like me for dat monkey-face to sound de come-an'-git-it. He's takin' him a walk ov'ah to dem funny rocks. Boy, howdy, dat Misto' Nathan sure does like to look at rock. All de time he—dog mah cats! Ah thought Ah seed some of dem bowlders move, up yonder on de hill."

Squint-eye sat up, a bitter expression on his grim, saturnine face and in his eyes. This Squint-eye was one of the best, if not the best, machine gunners in the outfit. It was he that boasted once, "Ah cuts hair wid dat gun at nine hundred yards."

"Man," he announced, "dat tongue of yoahs is tied in de middle an' runs at both ends."

"An' yoahs is de same," put in one of the other men, sleepily. "Ah sure wishes Yaller don't detail me no more wid you apes. Dat's all Ah got to say; nevah no more."

Cheerfully Skinnay began singing:

"Nevah no mo', nevah no mo'—
Ain't gwine to get detailed, nevah no mo'.
Ridin' up to heaven in a chariot of fiah,
And sit on de knee of de—"

His singing was interrupted by a yell from Squint-eye, issued as he dived for the gun trigger. "Mah Gawd! Look comin'! *On de fiah!*"

The camp was near a little stream and as far out from the base of the surrounding hills as possible. T'ang Wang had dropped back to bring the rear guard closer up now that the column was well in the Kuen Lun. The advance screen of swordsmen was scattered through the hills in front and on both sides.

Some of them, enough to maintain an irregular line around the entire camp, were in sight. But with those in the hills, Chinese without Manchu officers, the Afghans had played the old, old hill game of ambush and sudden death. They had slipped be-

low and around the small units, and in most cases the swordsmen had not even seen the steel by which they died. No guns were used, just the silent steel; and not one of the advance guard lived to win through with a warning.

What caused Squint-eye to yell was the first movement of the avalanche that poured down from the hills—big, bearded men with swords and the dreaded Afghan knives. Most of them were Afghans, but there were more than a few Uzbegs, Tartars, Chinese who had fled their War Lords, and Cossacks who had deserted or been driven from their *sotnias;* also men of mongrel breeds. Zaman Khan was a warrior who welcomed all good swords to his standard, despite race or color.

As the charge started, a compact little group ran out from behind the rocks which Nathan had started over to look at. Zaman Khan, from his post in the hills, had seen the old man leave the lines and, feeling that the Prophet had dropped the ripe fruit into his lap, he had ordered forward some of his clan to capture Nathan. It was this movement that had started the rest off.

Nathan looked up and saw what was bearing down on him. Turning, he started to run, but was overtaken before he had gone a yard. One of the big men reached out for him, got him, tossed him over his shoulder, and the entire group whirled around and ran back behind the rocks.

AS Squint-eye yelled and opened fire, Highnote, the bugler, had just raised the bugle to his lips to blow the reveille. Skinnay had been a little ahead of the schedule with his demand for the "come-an'-git-it" mess call. Highnote also saw what Squint-eye did, and instead of reveille, he blew "Boots and saddle — Troop mount—Charge—Commence firing," running them all together. Then, being game and dearly loving a fight himself, he started in on, "Oh, they keep the pigs in the parlor," which was the battle song of B Troop.

The swordsmen of T'ang Wang stood calmly where they were, making no effort to retreat from the howling death that was rushing toward them. They were picked men, all graduates from the school of swordsmen at Ningyuan. But they were outnumbered fifty to one, and they died in their tracks, carrying down with them double the number of their foes.

Squint-eye and the rest of the machine gun squad fired three or four rounds with the Browning and rifles which cleaned up their immediate front, then picked up the gun and ran for the lines. As they started, Skinnay saw Nathan, slung over an Afghan's shoulder, disappear around the rocks.

They just made the lines which opened up a little to let them through. So close behind them were the first Afghans that when Skinnay yelled: "Misto' Nathan's took! Misto' Nathan's took!" no one paid any attention to him; and Skinnay himself had other things to think of in trying to take care of a big Afghan who broke through the line right on top of him.

As the bugle finished the "Charge," Norcross ran out of his tent. He was in his pyjamas, but there was a cartridge belt around his waist and his heavy Colt .45 was in his hand. His feet were bare, but his blue eyes were as calm and smiling as ever. As he ran toward the north point of the star where the attack seemed the thickest, he shouted, as he passed the men on the line between the points: "Receive the gentlemen properly, you birds."

The men were on their feet, the bayonets had been snapped into place; and on all the lines between the machine guns, the gentlemen were being received with all B Troop had—which was quite a lot.

Before a round could be fired, the first Afghans had hit the line. It was the nearest to a surprise that Norcross and his men had ever experienced. One half minute more slowness in response to the bugle, and the first wave of big men, whose vital organs were protected by steely sinews and heavy sheepskin coats and quilted vests, would have flowed over the camp. They came up in great leaps and bounds; their faces, bearded to the eyes, were working with the lust for killing.

But they were met by equally big, steel-muscled men, who were just as prompt in either offense or defense. The colored men, neat and trim, smooth-shaven and immaculate in their khaki, did not give an inch; in most cases they actually stepped forward to close. The charge was made by an outfit hard to stop—but it met one just as hard to go up against.

The bayonets met the sword-blades and the knives with as hard a parry as the cut or thrust, there was a clang of steel on steel, the "Ho" of the big men as they put forth all their strength; and then one or the other went down, his place at once taken by another. It was a mad swirl of fighting for a few minutes. At several places four or five Afghans hit the line in a group and two or three colored men went down. The man does not live that can handle two fighting Afghans at the same time, unless he is using a gun at a distance. But the Afghans followed them to the ground as soon as Norcross and Yaller Coudray and some of the nearest machine gunners, who were taking care of such breaks in the line, saw what had happened.

The first wave suddenly ceased to exist and now the rifles and machine guns opened up.

"TIGHTEN up!" Norcross shouted. "Close up!" The star became smaller as the men picked up the space left by twenty of B Troop who would never again answer "Heah" or "Pres-unt" at roll call.

Back in the hills the mullahs, the fighting priests, could be heard chanting: "The sword is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer; whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven; at the day of judgment his wounds shall be resplendent as vermilion, and as odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim."

Zaman Khan had seen his men seize Nathan, and after a curt order to one or two of his lieutenants, the chief had disappeared. He knew that there was no need of his presence. Once the ball had started rolling and the mullahs began, he did not need to urge on the attack. Neither could he stop it.

All that the colored men had done was to clear the immediate front for a moment. The next wave arrived, charging into the very face of the deadly guns. Their numbers and the press behind brought them up to the lines in spite of the ones that fell. But always and ever, they were met by bayonet and Colt. The men of Norcross's outfit were now just as fight-crazy as the Afghans.

Landess had come out of the tent

that he shared with Nathan and stood in front of it. It was the first time he had seen men killed in battle, and his fine old face and eyes showed the horror of it to him. He tried to locate Nathan with his eyes, thinking that he must have sought cover somewhere. He saw Norcross, his pyjamas hanging from his body in bloody threads, a smile on his lips, encouraging the men as he ran from point to point.

From where he stood, Landess could hear Yaller Coudray: "Dem apes can't clean B Troop! Stay in de line! Dat's de boy, Buck! Slewfoot—take one of dem two offen Happy!" And he saw Yaller's lightning-like play with a bayoneted rifle.

In spite of the merciless fire, party after party of Afghans hit the line. The distance over which they charged was too short, on account of the rocks on the right and at the rear giving them cover until the last fifteen or twenty yards. Those who tried to charge on the left and in front were more in the open and few of them lived to match sword against bayonet.

There was a lull for a moment and the voices of the mullahs in the hills could be still heard, urging a final effort to wipe out the dogs of infidels, and promising reward in the Mohammedan heaven.

"Close up!" Norcross shouted. "Get those rapid-fire pieces over on that pass to the left! Strut your stuff, you no-'count scoundrels! We'll show those birds what B Troop can do. Sergeant!" he yelled to Coudray, forgetting in the stress of battle that he had made Coudray a lieutenant when the outfit swelled to three hundred men. Yaller Coudray was once more his old top-cutter and the men were B Troop. "If you see that we are going down, take ten men and cut your way out with Landess and Nathan. It is up to you to get them back to Ningyuan. Come in a little with that gun! What are you trying to do, take it all?"

The machine gun squad who had inched forward so as to get a clear half circle swing, grinned and moved back—back at least an inch, as Skinnay Martin came up to Norcross and obstructed his view of them.

SKINNAY saluted, for all that he looked, as one of the men said afterward, like "somepin' de cat brung in." He had gone to the ground in a wrestling match with a big Afghan, with life the stake; it had not improved his looks any, but he had the same old grin on his face.

"Capt'n, please suh, Misto' Nathan done been tooken by de wild men."

Norcross's face went white. "Say that again."

"Please suh, Ah said dat Misto' Nathan was walkin' ovah yonder by dem rocks, an' when de ruckus started, one of dem grabbed him and highballed it round de rocks wid him."

To Norcross came the picture of his wife, leaning across the table patting Nathan's hand; and her voice came clearly to his ears, above the cries of wounded men: "My Lord John will take you to the city."

Then, as if flashed on a screen, he saw Nathan's fine old face, the eyes shining with absolute confidence and happiness as the column left Ningyuan. The picture was blotted out by a wave of actual pain. He, John Norcross, late of the Army, fighter in the far places, had allowed the man that trusted him to be taken—and by Afghans.

All he was, all the military training, all the cool, clever, planning brain—everything was submerged in the one overwhelming urge of "Get Nathan!"

He ran to the point of the star fronting the rocks, stooped and picked up a bayoneted rifle. The big colored men from all the star, sensing something, were watching their "Capt'n."

Already those in the far lines had turned a little on their feet, and their rifles had dropped to "Charge bayonets." The machine gunners had stood up, their Brownings forgotten, rifles of the fallen in their hands. It was like a football team on the line, waiting to go down field at the kick-off. Every man tensed, quivering with eagerness. If the gates of hell were open in front of them, B Troop would have followed "de Capt'n" straight through them.

"Blow 'Charge,' Highnote," Norcross demanded.

But even as Highnote raised the bugle to his lips, the attack came once more from all sides. There was nothing for B Troop to do but fight where they were. The machine gunners crouched at the guns and the rifles spat out defiance, the men behind them as merciless as the men charging in. In the open, the fire would have destroyed any charge, but here, where there was cover, it was different. The Afghans reached and went over the two guns at the south point. It became a madhouse as the men rose from the guns. It was like some herd of grizzly bears in a death grapple with black wolverines.

Norcross saw the break in the line but could not reach it. He had been seen and recognized as the white leader, and the point where he was had become a mad corner of hell.

"Ain't dis some fight?" panted Happy Combes, as he came alongside of Sergeant Delicate Moss.

"Gimme mo' room!" grunted the immense Delicate, "till Ah mops up on dese cooties!"

Yaller Coudray, the Mobile Kid, Buck Foster, and Slewfoot, all big men, trained to the minute, fast as cats, stuck as close to Norcross as they could. Yaller had in mind Norcross's order regarding Landess and Nathan, but had privately made up his mind that "de Capt'n" was going also or he, Yaller, was going to be found dead as close to Norcross as he could get.

The star formation was gone now, but all over the field of battle there were rings of the colored men, like the shield rings of the Norsemen.

SUDDENLY wild yells came from the hills and the pressure relaxed, then fell entirely away. Down from the hills came four wedges of swordsmen. T'ang Wang had arrived with the rear guard.

They had passed some of the bodies of their comrades up in the hill and had seen the mutilation that the Afghan does as a show of contempt and disrespect.

Now they came down like maniacs, destroying all living things in their path. The Afghans turned to meet this new foe, but as the colored men opened up with the rifles and machine guns once more, the hillmen, realizing they were caught between two fires, broke and fled.

Norcross's brain had cleared and he remembered Landess. He started for the tents, then he saw him standing by the cook tent. Memphis, the tall, gaunt cook, with him. In front of the tent lay the bodies of two of the Afghans. They had won through that far, to be met by Memphis, who was a fighting man as well as a cook. One he killed with his Colt .45 as they came up. The other had to swerve a little to avoid the falling body and before his sword could sweep down, Memphis had him.

one iron hand on the sword wrist, the other at the throat. There had been an instant of strain, then Memphis swayed out and to the left, his hip coming against the Afghan's. The man rose in the air as he did, Memphis let go the wrist, his arm came under the shoulder of the Afghan and the body twisted. Landess, standing behind Memphis, shuddered as he saw the head loll over on a shoulder as Memphis let go.

As Norcross started over toward Landess, T'ang Wang came up.

"You are wounded, elder brother?"

"No—not seriously. Nathan is taken, through my negligence. I am going after him."

The Manchu looked at Norcross, then asked tensely, "Where?"

"Where? You do not understand, T'ang Wang. I said that Nathan had been captured. The man that trusted me, I allowed— He has been taken to the hills," Norcross went on, calmer now. "I will take as many men as I can, consistent with the safeguarding of Mr. Landess, and go find him."

"It is not your fault to grieve over, O Lord John," answered T'ang Wang. "My swords are to blame. They were the outer guard and they failed to keep it."

"You are delaying me, T'ang Wang. All the words in the world cannot alter the fact that he has been taken from me. *I* failed him, not your swordsmen. Sergeant Coudray, detail a party of—" Norcross looked at the colored men left on their feet. Of the one hundred and fifty that left Ningyuan, there remained only some ninety-odd. The rest lay on the ground, wounded or dead. "Detail twenty-five men to go into the hills with me. You will remain with the rest to taken care of Mr. Landess."

"O honorable elder brother," T'ang Wang said quietly, as Norcross turned, "your grief has led your clever spirit far along paths clouded with mist. No small party can go into the hills for hours yet and live. The Afghans and the mongrel dogs with them are running fast now. Let them clear and—will you grant me five minutes now, before you go? Then I will also go with you, elder brother."

NORCROSS looked at the proud Manchu noble that he knew loved him, and steadied himself. "Yes, T'ang Wang. Now the clouds have cleared away and I see clearly once more."

"I know that you do, Lord John. It may be that we can get some information that will enable us to strike quickly."

He pointed to a wounded Uzbeg near the lines and gave a curt order to the swordsmen who stood behind him. Two of them pounced on the wounded man and dragged him to T'ang Wang. The Manchu thrust his fierce, scarred face to within an inch of the Uzbeg's, who tried to cringe back.

"Who led?" T'ang Wang snarled, in Pushtu.

"Zaman Khan," answered the Uzbeg promptly. He owed no loyalty to the Afghan; and if he had, he would have told, just the same.

"Take him back," T'ang Wang ordered, then his eyes went to the piles of wounded and dead. An Afghan was sitting up, holding a shattered shoulder. Again T'ang Wang pointed and issued an order. The Afghan did not cringe and draw back as had the Uzbeg. He did his best to reach a sword; and failing that, he tried to kick and bite. But he was brought to T'ang Wang and held there.

"Lord John, this man will know where Zaman Kahn left the horses. It may be that he will not give the information willingly. I will send him behind those rocks with some of my men. When they return they will know all that he knows. It is for the Lord Nathan, elder brother."

Norcross did not have to be told what was going to happen to the Afghan unless he told, and very quickly. But that "for the Lord Nathan" made the decision for him.

"Tell him first that if he speaks he will be spared and sent on his way," he answered curtly, as he started for his tent.

The big colored men, engaged in giving first aid to the wounded, watched the Afghan being carried away, with cold eyes.

Before Norcross had washed and, with the help of Skinnay Martin, bandaged the not deep cuts on his chest and arms, T'ang Wang entered.

"The Lord Nathan was the object of the attack. Zaman Khan had received word from some source that the Lord Nathan was the rich man who had tried to go into the hills before. Zaman Khan promised the men that helped him the looting of the camp and a share in the ransom. As soon as the Lord Nathan was captured, Zaman Khan withdrew with some of his tribesmen. For which," T'ang Wang added with a grim smile, "he was cursed by this man, who is one of the Afridis, not of Zaman Khan's family. After a little, surprisingly little, persuasion, because of that fact, he told of where Zaman Khan left his horses, which is far from here owing to the footbridges to cross. He also drew a map of the way. Zaman Khan plans to take the Lord Nathan to his stronghold near Ghanzi."

Landess came in the tent.

"John," he said, gently, "I do not want you to consider me for a moment. Take all of your men and the Lord T'ang Wang's swordsmen. I will keep up if I can, and if not, I will sit on the side of the path and await your return with Isaac Nathan, or whatever death may come."

He stood there with a simple dignity that reached the Manchu noble and Captain John Norcross as nothing else could.

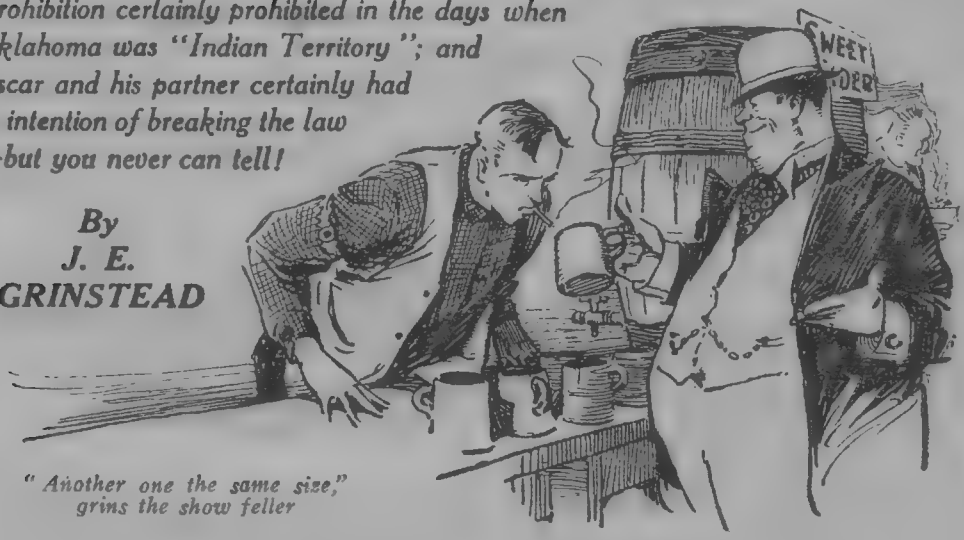
"We will find him, Mr. Landess," Norcross answered. "It will not be necessary that all the men go. A small, picked party can do much more in the hills. He will be with you once more very soon. We will draw back into the hills a little ways, and make a camp that—that will not be surprised this time. There most of the men will wait, with you."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Malt, Vinous, or Poisonous

Prohibition certainly prohibited in the days when Oklahoma was "Indian Territory"; and Oscar and his partner certainly had no intention of breaking the law —but you never can tell!

By J. E. GRINSTEAD



"Another one the same size," grins the show feller

DON'T stagger. The title looks bad, but it may not mean anything after all. This story is just a more or less truthful account of an incident, or maybe an episode, in the life of Oscar, who was not a drinking man at all. Oscar dissipated by eating soft-boiled eggs and soupy chili con carne about ten times a day, and pinching nickels from the proletariat between meals. If there is any moral to this record, it is that a perfectly honest and innocent man can violate the law without knowing it until too late. Oscar did.

One would think, from all the fuss that has been made about what Mr. Volstead went and done, that no nation ever tried prohibition as a beverage before. The fact is that another nation did have prohibition, and it was enforced by these same United States. It stuck, too, in a way—several ways, in fact.

That nation was the Indian Nation, now the prosperous and happy State of Oklahoma. When the Federal government put several tribes of noble red men, along with their wives, ponies, dogs and the rest, on those reservations, it issued an order which read:

> No Booze, Hooch, Tequila, Tanglefoot, Mescal, Shellac, Red Ink, or other malt, vinous, or poisonous intoxicating liquor shall be introduced into this territory; either for sale, or to be given as a premium with chewing gum, cigars, farm implements, or other merchandise. The reason for this order, if any is needed, is that all brands of happy juice is said to be unhealthy for Indians, and a dang sight more unhealthy for any whites who happen to be around when Indians drink it.
>
> Therefore: Any person or persons so introducing and selling or giving away said malt, vinous, or poisonous intoxicants, and any person or persons conspiring to violate, or in any way abetting the violation of this order, shall be guilty of a felony; and when

convicted, shall be damned sorry they were caught with the goods.

The foregoing quotation may not be *verbatim ad literatum*, as the woman said when she put pepper in the pie, but it was the spirit of the law, and thereby hangs the tale of Oscar.

This Oscar boy drifts into Jimtown, I. T. (Indian Territory for short) along in October A.D. back a ways. If he had any other name he didn't give it, possibly for reasons of his own. Oscar opened a Chili Parlor and Cold Drink Emporium in an old shack that was propped up with poles. He is a good mixer, and he makes good chili, so he does well.

The cold drink department consists of a ten-foot bar and a home-made ice box. There is room for the entire stock of red, white and blue soda in that ice box, because there is never any ice in it. Oscar puts a few chunks of rock salt in the bottom of the box. When a customer calls for something cold, Oscar rattles the chunks of salt, and makes the bluff stick.

OSCAR hadn't served more than three helpings of chili to the waiting public when a high-powered drummer drags into town. This gent was a fast worker, and before Oscar knew it, he was hooked for two barrels of white vinegar; and the drummer threw in a twenty-gallon keg of unfermented grape cider to cinch the deal. (Yes, stranger, that's what we call Mr. Bryan's grape juice out our way.)

"See here, partner," said Oscar, pulling his cap onto the side of his head, and wiping the egg and chili off his chin, "if that grape cider is the least bit hard, I don't want it. I aim to obey the law that it is ag'in' to sell booze in this country. In the first place, I'm honest. In the next place, the Federal penitentiary is no place to spend a happy winter."

"Not a hard spot as big as a pinhead in a barrel of that cider," the drummer came back. "It's as soft as a kitten's foot. You know I wouldn't help aid and assist, to violate or transgress this Federal liquor law. You—know—I—would—not! I like the climate too well outside stone walls."

Well, the drummer took Oscar's money, and that part of the deal was closed. I was eating a dish of chili and a few eggs in Oscar's joint when this deal was made. Before it is over and settled, I wish I had never heard of it. I—

Who, me? Beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen. Introducing Mr. Jimmy Hutchins, commonly called Hutch, for short. Sometime cow-puncher in No-Man's-Land. Drifted into the Chickasaw country when the boomers et the range out, and become a more or less talented salesman. That's me, and if you think I don't know the rest about that vinegar deal, just follow on to where the grass is better.

Now, to get on with the record of cold, stubborn, undeniable facts. A couple of weeks later, and close onto Halloween, a circus drives into Jimtown. Elephants, kangaroos, red ticket-wagon, brass band, lady performers in spangled tights, and everything.

The show drags in early in the morning. It is a cold, drizzly, raw and unhappy morning and the day don't get better as it gets older and knows how to behave. The show folks corral the elephants and spotted horses, and runs up the patched tent.

All and sundry in that great tented aggregation of wonders is on the grouch. The crop of fish has not been good—not fish to feed the sea-lions,

but fish to feed the circus with four-bit pieces. The circus ain't made enough in a week to buy hay for the elephant. There is right smart of people in town by noon. They look the layout over, but don't jar loose. The advance sales at the ticket-wagon look like a church collection on a rainy Sunday.

Meantime, other things come to town. One of 'em was Charlie Burns, or Byron, or—anyway, he wasn't ary poet. He was a deputy marshal, and his name was Charlie. His sworn duty was to uphold the Federal law, and particularly ag'in' malt, vinous, and poisonous.

In them mid-Victorian days, circuses were considered fester-spots of evil, and no respectable people went to 'em, except to take the children. This Marshal Charlie was a wise owl. He knew that unless his suppressor was working good, a lot of crime would fail to get suppressed in Jimtown that day; so he was on the job, with both eyes wide open and a staring.

THE only other real important arrival in the city that day was Oscar's two barrels of vinegar, his twenty-gallon keg of soft cider, and a dozen or two cases of soda for the circus trade. I comes along while they are unloading it, and wishes later that I hadn't. Oscar sees me and says:

"Hutch, you don't aim to go to that circus, do you?"

"Why, no," I says. "I've saw it twice since it got on our range. It ain't improved none, and I think I'll save four bits."

"Fine!" he says. "I got all I can do making chili and dishing it up. I want you to sorty work behind the bar, like. Rattle the rock salt, hand out the soda, and rake in the pennies."

I falls, as the innocent often does—and like them, I comes dang nigh getting kicked while I was down. I don't know how long the law ag'in' crimes and misdemeanors runs in Federal court. If what happened that day is outlawed by limitation, this is a true story. If it ain't—you know what I mean.

Oscar and me drives a cedar spigot into that keg of grape cider, and upended it on the back end of the bar, so's I can draw it handy. After that we set half a dozen of these little demitaw beer mugs on the head of the barrel. They hold about half a gill, and was designed for drinking poison.

With everything ready, we backs off and waits for trade. Me at the bar, up front, and Oscar at the chili counter in the back. By this time the wind has riz from the north, and is hard as a pawnbroker's heart, and cold as the stare of virtue.

It's almost noon when little Dick Waite comes bouncing across the street, trying to keep his feet on the ground in the wind. Dick weighs about ninety pounds, and rarely speaks above a whisper. His wife tells him when to, and when not to. But Dick has pinched a few pennies off an unsuspecting customer at his store, and is out to throw a wild party by eating a dish of chili. He enters and heads straight for the chili counter.

Oscar is doing all right, but there is a lull in business with me. Nobody that ain't crazy wants soda on a day like that. Dick Waite finishes his chili and slips a thin dime to Oscar. Then he comes on up front, buttoning his thirty-four coat over his wishbone. He stops at the cider barrel, and rolls an eye at the glasses on top.

"What's in that barrel, Mr. Hutchins?" Dick whispers.

"Cider," I says.

"Is it hard?" and he kinder wiggled the two little patches of whiskers in front of his ears.

"No, sir, it ain't. Them's unfermented grape juice, soft as a kitten's foot, and pleasing to the palate. It was put up original for sacramental purposes, and they had some left. Ten cents a shot. One dime."

"I—I believe I'll try one," says Dick, recklessly, slipping another thin dime onto the bar.

I draws it nonchalant, like I was flustered and reaching for some sort of tailor-made cigarette. Dick Waite was the first one to sample that cider. Oscar and me have been too busy, so we got a clean alibi.

I watch Dick take his medicine. He sticks his rooter into it a little, then works his lips and his nose, like a rabbit eating.

"Soft, sweet and lovely," he murmurs, as he puts up the mug and downs the works.

It ain't twenty feet from that cider barrel to the front door, but Dick Waite changes complete in that short distance. As he goes out he meets the ticket-seller of the show coming in. This bird is six foot two, and weighs plenty. He brushes Dick a little, and Mr. Waite looks up at him and snarls:

"Who the hell are you shovin'?"

It was so loud that the glasses rattle on the top of the barrel.

THAT surprises me, of course, but I ain't got time to watch and wonder. Other things happen. The show fellow comes on to the bar, while this Charlie-boy marshal, with a gun on him two feet long, steps in the door with his thumbs in his cartridge belt, and leans against the wall in plain sight.

"Brother," croaks the ticket-seller, "ain't you got some sort of throat gargle? I been barking tickets in this cold wind until the whole inside of my neck is raw. Worst weather I ever saw in my life, and it won't clear up until spring."

"Sorry, pardner," I says, with right smart dignity, "but this is no blind tiger. It ain't even weak-eyed. Best I can do for you is some cider that's soft as a kitten's foot, and—"

"Gimme a shot of it."

I pulls out another glass of that delicious, ropy beverage. The show fellow sinks it, licks his chops and grins.

"'Nother'n the same size," he says.

He bolts his second helping, and goes on back to his ticket-wagon on the vacant lot across the street. He hasn't got the foundation of banked fire in his system that Dick Waite's chili makes, so he don't get as sudden action. After the show fellow goes out, Marshal Charlie strolls up to the bar and says:

"Hutch, I don't blame that hombre for wanting something to make his blood circulate on a day like this. I'd like to catch somebody with a flat quart on his person, myself. Don't you boys know who's got some?"

I looks him over cold and flat, and then I says, "Charlie, I got to tell you that this Oscar boy is running a straight joint. If you are looking for stimulants, you are coming to a cow's house for mutton when you come here. The only stimulant in this place is some of Oscar's chili."

"Maybe so," says Charlie. "Guess I'll try some. I got to get warm some way, or freeze to death."

So Charlie goes on back to the chili counter. Oscar ladles him out about a quart in a big bowl, and shoves the pan of crackers over to him. That

chili is still bubbling a little from the fire, and it is red as the show's ticket-wagon with the hottest pepper that ever grows in Mexico.

Charlie throws in a spoonful, and flinches as it sears the inside of his face. A coupla big tears roll down his cheeks, but he goes bravely on. A little liquid fire can't bluff a hard-boiled marshal like him.

Silence broods heavy over Oscar's Emporium, save for the steady swish and gurgle of Charlie's tropical fruit in liquid form. There's nobody else in the place but him and me and Oscar. This Oscar boy has took advantage of the quiet moment to dish himself out a helping of chili. He breaks two eggs into the bowl, and they are hard-boiled before they sink.

Above the subdued murmur of Oscar and Charlie disposing of their blister juice, I can hear that ticket-seller in his red wagon across the street. His voice is now as clear as a summer day, and as high as the sun at noon.

"Tickets here, ladies and gents," he yells. "Only a few more vacant seats in the big tent. The clouds are breaking, the sun will be out in a few minutes, the birds will sing and the band will play, and joy will reign soo-preeme!"

"Something has shore changed that gent from old man Grouch L. Pessimist's oldest son, to Katy Gay Optimist's dimpled darling," I'm thinking to myself; but something happens to break my chain of thought.

THIS Marshal Charlie shoves back his chili dish, and comes toward the front of the house. He's got his mouth half open, and is blowing like a stuttering man trying to say "who."

"Hut's in that heg, Hutch?" he asks, without closing his mouth on the fire that's in it.

"Cider," I says.

"Gimme a gallon of it. I want to put this fire out. One of them little glasses wouldn't do any good."

I draws four glasses and dumps it into a quart tin cup.

"Put in one more, and make it even money," says Charlie, as he flips a four-bit piece on the bar, and grabs the handle of the cup. Charlie bolts his beverage whole, and it locates and goes to keeping house with that chili. As he sets the cup down, sweat breaks out on his nose and under his eyes.

"Whoof!" he blows. "Must be getting a lot warmer outdoors. I got to go see about my horse."

As Charlie goes out that door he's the biggest man I ever saw. He reaches clean across from one side to the other. As he goes out, a barrel-shaped gent comes in. He has his sleeves rolled up, and he's got an anchor tattooed on one arm and a picked chicken on the other. This gent shoves an empty lard bucket across the bar and growls right low and hoarse:

"Ticket-seller says send him a gallon of that soft cider."

"Can't do it, pardner," I says. "It's ten cents a glass, straight, and too high to sell by the gallon. Anyway, we ain't got no gallon licenses."

"I got a two-gallon one, brother," he growls out of the side of his mouth. "I'm the strong man in the circus, and— Draw it in a glass, and keep count until you get the bucket full."

He looks strong and sounds sane, so I don't argue. I dumps in thirty-two glasses of cider, and takes three twenty out of his five-dollar bill, while he grabs his bucket and heads for the circus. I'm doing some figuring.

Twenty gallons, at them figures, is going to run around sixty-four dollars, which ain't bad for a barrel of cider that don't cost Oscar anything but the freight.

While I'm doing my mental daily dozen or two, Oscar comes up front and says:

"Hutch, if you aim to sell that stuff by the gallon, we got to have more of it."

Understand, Oscar is straight as a string, but he's a shrewd business man. He sets the glasses off the top of that cider barrel and pulls out the big stopper in the end.

"Thanks," I says. "I never thought of that. She can get air now, and the cider will come out easier."

"Yes," he says, licking the chili and egg off his lower lip. "And it'll go in easier."

Then Oscar goes off into the little room at the back. Everything is quiet. The ticket-seller is getting louder and louder, and is selling tickets by sheer strength of voice and sunny optimism, in spite of that cold, drizzling rain. A long yellow slicker comes in the front door, looking like it is on a pole with a death's-head at the top of it. This bogey drifts up to the bar and sets a three-gallon iron bucket on the slats.

"The ticket-seller wants three gallons of them cider," he says, in a sad, mournful tone.

"Who are you?" I comes back.

"Living skellington in the circus," he says. "I also doubles in brass."

He looks like he could double in a pipestem, so I don't argue. I just grabs up the quart cup, fills it, dumps it in the big bucket and calls it eight. When I get three gallons into the bucket, this cheater of the graveyard shoves a ten-dollar bill across the bar and croaks:

"Put in four more glasses and kill it."

I OBLIGE, and he grabs the bucket and departs. Then Oscar comes in from the back, lugging two big iron buckets, and sets 'em on the floor behind the bar.

"What's that?" I asks him.

"Replenishment for the cider barrel," he grins. "You can't go on selling it that way, off'n twenty gallons."

"I know I can't, but what is that stuff?"

"Half water, half good apple vinegar that we bought with this cider, and a pint of good strawberry flavoring extract. Grape and strawberry ought to blend, they both grow on vines."

With that piece of logic, Oscar climbs onto a box and dumps one bucket of the mess into the barrel. Then he goes on:

"When she begins to get low, put in the other bucket and yell for more. I aim to please, and it won't please nobody to want cider and not get it," and he takes up the empty bucket and goes on to the back, leaving me alone at my post.

In the quiet, I goes to the door and listens to a strange sound. I ain't never heard anything like it before, and I thought I had heard everything. I finally decides it must be that band over at the circus, but it don't sound like no band I ever heard. While I'm standing there I see old Deacon Riggs walking around the circus lot. He's moving slow and looking down at the ground, like a gopher looking for a soft place to go under. He looks up and sees me watching him, so he comes right straight over.

Now, what happens after this ain't nobody's fault. It just happens, and

that's all they are to it. Deacon Riggs was the best man I ever saw, and I've seen 'em all. There was things he wouldn't stand for, and when he didn't believe in a thing he didn't do it himself, knowingly.

"Ah, me, Brother Hutchins," he says to me, as he steps into Oscar's Emporium, "evil will come of this circus. I just been over looking at some elephant tracks. I got a little patch of goobers down on the creek. Something has been pestering 'em, and I thought it might be elephants. I hadn't ever seed an elephant's track before, that I knowed of, and I wanted to be right. 'Be shore you are right, then go ahead,' as old Davy Crockett used to say, back a ways."

"Yes," I says; "elephants is right bad after peanuts. Hope it wasn't them."

"I've heard they was. Circuses is sinks of iniquity, Brother Hutchins. I'm proud to see that you ain't patronizing this evil thing. A good menagerie is all right, and instructive to the young people, but—"

"You're shore right, Deacon," I says. "Have a glass of cider on the house."

"Why—er—it—it ain't hard, is it, Brother Hutchins?"

"Soft as a kitten's paw," I quotes. "It's the kind Solomon took for the stomach ache. Made for sacramental purposes. They was some left, and we got it. Oscar wouldn't handle anything hard, except silver money. He keeps the ax-handle padded, so his wife won't hurt her hands when she chops the wood at home."

I draws a glass and the Deacon bolts it and smacks his lips kinda reminiscently.

"Um-m! Soft and sweet, with just a little tang at the back end. 'Minds me of my boyhood home back in the vine-clad hills of—"

"HEY! What the hell kind of a damn' blind tiger is this you are running?" roars a big voice from the door.

I looks up and sees it. He's a gent that would weigh two hundred without his hide. He wears a shiny silk hat and a long-tailed coat, and right in the middle of about two acres of white shirt there is a patent diamond big as a biscuit, and shiny as a new dishpan.

This gent bristles up to the bar and says some. Right smart more, in fact. I'm about to interrupt, and tell him that profanity ain't allowed in the presence of Deacon Riggs, when the Deacon takes the deal from me and says:

"You are mistaken, my brother. I know Jimmy Hutchins, and I know he wouldn't be a party to putting anything into men's stomachs to steal away their brains. If I didn't know that, I would not be in here myself. Some unscrupulous person may be selling your performers intoxicating liquor, and causing your band to sound even more like a croupy jackass braying than usual, as you say, but it is not Brother Hutchins. Calm yourself, sir, and take a glass of cider with me."

That was when I began to suspect that there was something the matter with that cider. The Deacon fished out two old black dimes that had been in his pocket as long as the memory of man, and flipped 'em nonchalantly on the bar. He never had spent any money before, and it looked plumb uncanny, to me. I draws and they drinks. The big boy licks his lips a minute, and then says:

"Take one on me, Parson."

"Not parson," murmurs the deacon, "just a deacon; Deacon Riggs, at your service."

"Shore! Excuse me. Higginbotham is my name, sole owner and manager of the famous Higginbotham circus and hippydrome. My mistake, but a drink by any other name would still be—why, it would still be a drink! Here's how."

They take the goods without tearing it, and then the hippydrome gent wipes his hand on the back of his mouth and says:

"Well, the show starts in a few minutes, and I got to be getting back to the big tent. Mighty happy to meet you two gents, and sorry I can't stay more. Be glad to give you passes to the show."

"I can't leave the Emporium," I says. "Thanks just the same."

"I see. How about you, Brother Riggs? I know churchmen don't approve of circuses, but mine is a strictly moral and instructive show, indorsed by churches everywhere. You'll enjoy it."

"Why," says Deacon Riggs, "I believe men orrer be broad-minded and tor'rant. Of course, all shows ain't bad, and—"

"Come on, then. I'll take you right in with me, and find you a good ringside seat."

Hippy hooks his arm into the Deacon's and they march out. They go out the front door like a yoke of steers going through a narrow gate. On they rambles toward the circus, the Deacon walking like he's trying to step over a pig-trough.

"Oscar," I says, "there's something wrong with that cider."

"The Deacon do walk funny," grins Oscar.

"Walk funny? I got more evidence than that. Deacon Riggs spent twenty cents, two whole dimes, and it takes potent stuff to jar him loose from coin. That cider's got happy juice in it. This ain't no pastime for an honest man. This Charlie-boy marshal that's on the job here to-day don't need half that much evidence. If he sees a man stumble, he condenses the feller's breath, and gets enough evidence to convict. If Charlie comes back in here, I'm going out, and that's now!"

I takes two steps toward the back door, then stops. The big gent with the gun on ain't Charlie. It's Joe Latta, of the J2, and he's got five of his punchers with him. Three of 'em are Indians.

"Hi, Hutch!" yells Joe. "Ain't you got something hid up that 'll make the blood circulate?"

"Nothing but cider," I says.

"All right, give us some. Set out the peppersauce bottle, so we can make it scratch, and fool our stomachs into believing we have took a drink."

I GOT to say that right here the main orgy of the day begins. Joe and his hands lap up six rounds of that cider. By that time one of the Indians is spinning the cylinder of his gun, and I need a nerve tonic. Joe saves the day, and what's left of my life, by yelling:

"Come on, fellers. Let's see the circus. I want to see that gal in pink tights bust that paint braunk," and out they go.

"Them fellows acts funny, too," says Oscar. "Dump that other bucket of vinegar and water into the barrel, while nobody ain't in here."

I climbs onto the box and fills the barrel until it gurgles out the hole on top. Then as I climbs down, I says—and I mean it plumb sane and sober:

"Oscar," I says, "the best thing we can do is to drive the stopper into that suspicious cider barrel, and roll it out the back door and on into the creek. If that Charlie feller—"

Too late! This Jimtown place has got the most promiscuous and variegated assortment of hootch-hounds and honey-hunters on earth. Let one of 'em see a man on the street whose legs fail to coördinate with his intentions, and they trail true to the source of the trouble.

Old Doc Calvin comes in, and in five minutes they are four deep in front of that bar, and all yelling for cider. They dang nigh empty the barrel, then they all take a notion to go to the circus and spend some money. As they cross the street, half a dozen of 'em lets out yells.

"Oscar," I says, "this thing is getting serious. Putting vinegar and water into that mess is like trying to put out fire with kerosene. It makes it dang sight worse. Bring me a couple of buckets of straight water. I know that ain't malt, vinous, or poisonous. You can put in some more paint when it begins to get pale and listless."

I puts in two buckets of water. Crowds kept coming, but they drank in reason, and went on to the show without undue hilarity. We had put in another bucket of water, and that reduced the consistency of the liquid to a pale, cold pink. Then Old Bill Sherill comes in.

Bill is the last of the circus-going throng. Bill is an outstanding citizen of Jimtown, and is looked up to because he can drink anything that 'll run, except lava, and he ain't ever tried that. He laps up a quart of the kitten's paw special brew, then throws his glass at the barrel and goes out cussin' the stuff because it don't scratch. After that comes another peaceful lull in business. Everybody has gone to the circus.

"Thank the Lord," I says. "We got it down to where it's safe, at last, but the keg is about empty. I had to tilt it to get the last glass. Charlie won't find a sample that 'll convict, if he comes back now."

I had clean forgot that Charlie packed a life-size sample off with him. I'd been watching that door with one eye and making change with the other, until I couldn't see the same thing with both eyes any more. This Charlie boy was the feller I had been watching for. Now I could rest my eyes, and try to get 'em back in focus. Charlie was probably at the circus, but I didn't care if he did come now.

"But, Hutch," says Oscar, scratching his head, "we got to have cider for the trade. We got it coming our way, now, and I can't afford to lose the business. That crowd will come back from the circus dry in the face. Listen at 'em yell!"

SO, we fills the barrel. One bucket of water, one bucket of vinegar, and one bottle of strawberry extract. I'll never forget the formula. That extract was thick syrup, and we had to shake the bottle and then wash it out to keep from wasting it.

"All set," I says wearily. "When that gang comes back from the circus we'll have something that is softer than a kitten's paw for 'em."

Oscar eats another dish of chili and a few more eggs, while I smoke some, and rest my eyes. First out of the circus was Joe Latta and his punchers. They come whooping across the street, straight for Oscar's Emporium.

"Give us some cider, Hutch!" yells Joe, as they line up.

I turn the spigot and she runs red as a Western man's blood. I places six glasses on the bar, and sets myself to hear a howl when that mess fails to go home and knock at the right door. I know the nature of that cider is changed teetotal. I'm agreeable surprised, when Joe smacks his lips, shoves his glass across the bar, and says:

"Ah-h! That's something like. Fill 'em up again."

They had lapped up six rounds when the crowd comes howling in from the circus. Joe looks at me sorty funny, winks one eye, and him and his punchers gives back to let the crowd to the trough.

I'm busier than a fly in a bottle for the next half an hour. If there is a man in Jimtown that hasn't got a helping of that cider in his system, it's because he has a dozen. Joe Latta and his boys wedge in a coupla more times, and each time I hear him say:

"All right, fellers. We'll take this one, then we got to ride."

Gradually, the crowd begins to thin out. Oscar ain't got any chili business, so he puts in his time in the back room making "cider" out of vinegar and bringing it to me in a bucket, so I can put it in the barrel. He explains to the boys that the other barrel ain't got no place for a spigot.

Night is coming on; the quiet hour when hens hovers their broods, and mothers calls their children in and grease the bridges of their noses and the soles of their feet, to ward off croup. I'm still behind the bar, like the boy on the burning deck—weary, but willing.

There is nobody in the Emporium now but I and Oscar. He goes over and draws himself a bowl of chili and a few more eggs. I roll a smoke and rest. I look down at the two cigar boxes full of money under the bar, and sigh. It looks to me like the end of a perfect day; but it ain't — not quite!

There is one language that I learned when I was young. I never could speak it perfect, but I never can entirely forget it. I was roused from my sad, sweet reverie by hearing it now. Out there in the dreary night and drizzling rain, it brought back memories that I'll never be able to erase from a more or less tortured and weary brain:

"Ee-e-e! Ee-e-ee! Eee-ee-eep! *Pow, pow, pow!*"

I heard my master's voice. If you ain't ever heard a drunk Indian yell, and punctuate his remarks with an old forty-five, and still think you want to hear it, you are mistaken! I slams the front door shut, and gets the bar in place, just as somebody slams the door with everything he's got, or can get, and yells:

"Open up. I want a drink!"

I grabs Oscar by the arm, and races him to the back. We just get comfortable seated, as low as we can, behind the stove, when the party starts right. Bullets whine through the thin wall, splinters fall, and glass tinkles. I never realizes before how true it was that a man in a box house lacked only seven-eighths of an inch of being out doors.

One bullet lifts Oscar's favorite chili bowl, which he has just filled. It showers us with red blister juice until we look the foreman and first assistant in a ketchup factory. But we don't complain. We are on the floor behind the stove, and happy to be there.

"I wonder what that Marshal Charlie means, that he don't stop that," chatters Oscar. "L-looks to me

like he ain't much of a marshal, after all."

THE row lasts for ten minutes, and then Joe Latta got his gang out of town, solely because it was pouring rain and getting colder, and they had to ride or freeze. Oscar and me crawled out from behind the stove. *We* weren't cold! I been thinking serious while I'm in that humble position, and I still ponders while we pour out the cash and count it.

"Three hundred and twenty dollars," I says. "That ain't so bad for a barrel of cider that costs you only the freight."

"No," says Oscar, thoughtfully, "but I don't want any more like that. What are we going to do now? The rain is falling in chunks, the creek's a mile high, and we both live on the other side."

"Oh, it's comfortable here—now," I says. "I aim to investigate a few things."

I goes around behind the bar, washes a glass, and draws out a modicum of that life-blood from the keg. Up to that time, Oscar and me is two innocent, unsuspecting young men. I have kept the time-honored tradition of not drinking behind the bar, and I ain't ever tasted that cider. Oscar never takes anything but chili and eggs, anyway, so he ain't tasted it. I takes a sip of it, and both my eyes come open and focus on that glass, while my nose goes into it.

"Oscar," I says, "did you ever drink any whisky?"

"No," he snaps back. "I've tasted the stuff, and I don't like it. That's one thing I don't have anything to do with. Look what it will do for a fellow. That gang have been drinking water and vinegar, and they think they are drunk. Nothing on earth makes a bigger fool of a man than the drinking habit."

"I see," says I, and I reckon I grinned some. "Let's go have a look at them vinegar barrels."

We lights another candle and goes into the back room. One vinegar barrel is standing on its end back in the corner. The other one is on a high cradle, with a spigot in the end of it.

"Which barrel did you get that vinegar out of?" I asks.

"Why, the one on the cradle, of course. The other one ain't been opened."

I draws some vinegar into a glass and takes a sniff, then I looks at Oscar sadly. It's a terrible thing to be deceived by a friend you have placed confidence in.

"We ain't so damn smart after all," I says, when I can get my breath. "We been selling half-and-half, water and alcohol, with the strawberry juice thrown in, for ten cents a shot, when it was worth a dollar in this arid waste. Too cheap, Oscar. Much too cheap," and I sigh at the lost opportunity. "Charlie has got the goods on us, and we got to go to the pen anyway. We had just as well got a fair price for the refreshments."

"Wha-what!" yelps Oscar.

"That's what I said. This stuff is pure alcohol."

"Why, I—I bought it for vinegar. It's a mistake. I can't be put in the pen for a mistake that I didn't make. It's the vinegar people done it."

"Yes, I reckon it was, but you'll have one hell of a time making a jury believe you didn't know the difference between plain vinegar and proof spirits."

"Honest, Hutch. You—you don't think— I thought it smelled pretty

ripe for vinegar, but some of this cheap acid vinegar is like that. I was in a hurry all the time, you know, and never noticed—"

"Well, here we are," I says. "Guilty of introducing and selling malt, vinous, *and* poisonous. We got enough stock left to send us to the pen for a thousand years."

Oscar almost cries, and then he swears some, though he ain't bad about swearing.

"Ain't no use swearing now," I tells him. "Time enough for that when we get on the witness stand."

We roll the barrel off the cradle, knock the spigot out, and put it in the other barrel. Then we roll this full barrel onto the cradle, and I turns the spigot. She bleeds straight vinegar. Real vinegar, this time. I sighs with relief.

We could see that some fast work was needed, and we went at it. We drained the cider keg, and put the mess into the alcohol barrel. Then we washed the keg out, and puts in a handful of cloves for its breath. After that we puts it back on the bar, and introduces a bucket of real vinegar and water, and a helping of strawberry. We meant to avoid even the appearance of evil from there on.

After that we puts on our slickers, drives the stopper in the alcohol barrel, and rolls it to the creek, which is about fifty feet back of the shack, and roaring high. Oscar stoves in the head of the barrel, and we let her go with the current.

"Whoof!" says Oscar, when we are back in the shack. "I'm glad the evidence is all gone."

"Gone? Why, you poor nut, Charlie seen enough evidence to convict the twelve apostles of murder. You better let me talk when he comes in here. You could be arrested for the way you look."

IT was still raining when morning came. Oscar and me makes some coffee, fries a few eggs and fortifies ourselves the best we can for what's going to happen. Then we cleans out the joint and opens the door. It ain't been open a minute when in comes Charlie-boy, eyes all red and swollen.

"Hutch, gimme a shot of that cider."

I draws him a glass. He takes a sip and spits it out.

"That ain't fitten to drink," he says.

"Same as it was yesterday," I tells him, "and you liked it then."

"Oh, hell, Hutch! I need something. Ain't you boys got a little bottle somewhere that you keep in case of illness?"

"Not a drop, Charlie," I says, soberly. "Not even a bottle stopper that you could chew. Oscar won't stand for it. Better drink about a gallon of coffee."

When Charlie has got his jaw teeth floating in coffee he rolls a smoke and says:

"Hutch, that cider I drank yesterday knocked me cold. I felt funny and went around to that plow shed at the back of the big store and lay down. That was the last thing I knew until about an hour ago. When I woke up I had to feel of myself to see if I was alive."

"Oh, yeah?" I grins at him. "You said yesterday you'd like to pinch some gent with a flat quart. I guess you pinched him all right, and then some."

"Honest, Hutch, I didn't. I got to apologize to you boys. That cider you give me just now is as innocent as a crippled lamb, and here I thought I had the goods on you!"

"But you haven't, and won't. Now see here, Charlie, we don't aim to be spiteful. If the chief marshal knew you laid in that shed, dead to the world, all of yesterday and last night, when everybody in town, except Oscar and me, was blind drunk and raising hell, it would make you trouble. Best you can do is to take another cup of coffee, then mount and ride before anybody else sees you. Maybe you can frame up some sort of an alibi, and we won't talk."

"Thank you, Hutch," he says solemnly. "I won't forget this kindness."

Charlie mounts and rides. Oscar is so happy he splits me fifty dollars off the roll, and he ain't bad about splitting either. He lets his wife split the kindling, so he won't get the habit.

It is along toward noon and still raining. Nobody has been in the shack but Oscar and me. A buggy, splashed all over with mud, rolls into town and stops in front of Oscar's door. That fool drummer that sells Oscar the vinegar crawls out and comes in. He sees nobody but us two around there, so he blurts out:

"There was a mistake made in your order. My house won't ship intoxicants into this country, and—"

"The hell they won't!" I breaks in. "One of them barrels of vinegar was—"

"I know, I know. I want to explain. What did you do with it?"

"We rolled it down to the creek. Oscar stove the head in, and we let it ride. The other barrel was vinegar, as ordered."

"Yes," said the drummer, "it was like this—" Then he stops with his mouth open, points to the cider barrel on the bar, and makes a noise like a fish trying to talk.

"Oh, we got rid of that, too," I says. "Now tell your yarn."

"WHY, that order was for a local option town in East Texas, where there's a big sawmill. You got their stuff, and they got yours. We didn't know anything about it until they tapped the cider they got. When it wouldn't make happy come, them sawmill niggers raised a howl, and the merchant jumps us. I was afraid it would get you into trouble, so I jumps a buggy and drove all night in the rain, to get here. I'll ship you another barrel of vinegar, and another keg of cider."

"Never mind," I says. "Just pay us the price of that barrel of vinegar that turned out to be alcohol, and the freight on that barrel of cider, and we'll call it square."

"That's pretty hard," says the drummer, "but we are lucky to get out that easy."

"All right. And now, if you don't mind, tell us what was the matter with that grape cider?"

"Nothing," grins the drummer. "It was a sorty saturated solution of sweet wine and happy dust, warranted to kill anything but a sawmill nigger....So long, fellows. I'm going to sleep all day."

When the drummer's gone, Oscar looks at me and says:

"Hutch, you'd made a dead man pay rent on his grave."

"Couldn't help it, Oscar. We couldn't let that fellow know what we done. We introduced, sold—and I give away one glass—of malt, vinous, *and* poisonous. I'm shore glad they put 'and when convicted' in that law. If I was any sorrier than I am, I'd be dead."

THE END.

Devil Pearls

Novelette—Complete

By
RALPH R. PERRY
Author of "Rising Waters," "Virgin Diamonds," etc.

"Gimme that paper!" Twist commanded. "And move slow, Bill"

Bellow Bill Williams knew it wasn't kindliness that led his worst enemy to give him the key to a South Seas treasure—but he didn't know what a strange menace guarded that hoard

CHAPTER I.

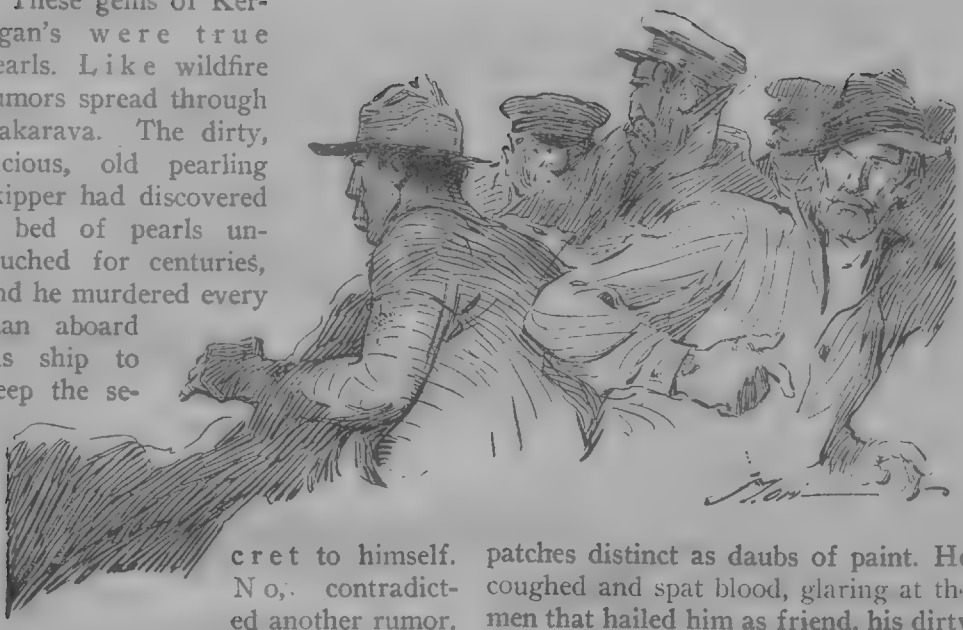
A DANGEROUS LEGACY.

NEVER had such pearls been seen, even in Fakarava, the chief harbor of the Paumotu Archipelago and the center of the pearling industry throughout the South Seas.

Each of the three gems which "One Eye" Kerrigan brought back from his last cruise was over half an inch in diameter. Each was perfectly spherical, and the weight of each was within a few grains of the same amount.

Such exact matching was as incredible as the size. Indeed, buyers believed at first that they must be examining a masterpiece of the art of the pearl imitator or pearl culturer.

Experts set that suspicion at rest. The nacre which coated the gems was the work of a pearl oyster, not of human skill; and though the Japanese have succeeded in making oysters coat small objects placed inside the shell with mother of pearl, such cultured gems are seldom spherical. The matrix is placed against one of the muscles with which the bivalve opens its shell, whereas the true pearl is found inside the oyster's flesh.



These gems of Kerrigan's were true pearls. Like wildfire rumors spread through Fakarava. The dirty, vicious, old pearling skipper had discovered a bed of pearls untouched for centuries, and he murdered every man aboard his ship to keep the secret to himself. No, contradicted another rumor. From some native who had preserved the ancient lore of the Paumotus he had learned the mystery which still baffles scientists: what causes pearls to grow in the flesh of an oyster, and how to initiate and expedite that growth for his own gain. Once the secret was learned, One Eye had killed the native and his own crew.

For certain it was that One Eye Kerrigan had gone to sea with two native divers and a cook, but had sailed his schooner back alone—worn to a skeleton, racked with a cough, and with an insane and vicious glare in his single eye.

When he left the pearl buyers, all Fakarava was crowded around the door of the shop to induce or force him to reveal his secret, yet that greed-maddened mob quailed before the look on his face and drew apart to give him passage.

The wrinkled skin was drawn tight across his cheek bones and sagged in pouches upon his skinny neck. The face was mottled red and white in patches distinct as daubs of paint. He coughed and spat blood, glaring at the men that hailed him as friend, his dirty white mustache bristling above lips that lifted from his teeth in the snarl of a mad dog.

"Yes, there are more pearls, damn you all!" he snarled. "Now get out of my way and let me die in a bed. I'll tell the latitude and longitude before I croak, and you can fight for the pearls with the devils that guard them!"

Straight across the street he walked through a silent mob, registered at the hotel, and fell into bed, where he lay and coughed. A doctor, hastily summoned, reported that One Eye was at the last gasp of pneumonia. Only the venomous strength of his will had enabled him to reach Fakarava. By no possibility could he live out the night.

UPSTAIRS Kerrigan lay and coughed. When he was delirious he babbled of devils and pools of ink. When he was sane he glared out of one eye at the ceiling and smiled at some secret of his own, in a way that made the doctor shudder.

Afternoon became twilight. After the quick sunset of the tropics, night settled down, dark and starlit; and still One Eye held his tongue.

"Devil or not, you'll dive, or I'll put a bullet through your black hide!" he screamed once—but never a word of latitude or longitude, and the disappointed listeners were only able to guess more accurately at the fate which had overtaken Kerrigan's crew.

As the shops closed and the day's work ended, all the white men of Fakarava drifted one by one into the sick room, into the passages outside, into the hotel lobby.

All, that is, save "Bellow Bill" Williams. Kerrigan, who hated every one, hated Bill worst; and Bill refused to fawn on an enemy he despised, even for the sake of such pearls as have not been seen since Cleopatra tossed her earrings into vinegar and drained the mixture to prove to Mark Antony that she could spend more on a single draught than his vaunted extravagance had lavished on his banquet, when he feasted a hundred guests.

Bellow Bill sat in an *estaminet* which even the proprietor had deserted. A glass of beer was gripped in one huge, tattooed fist. His chin was bowed on his chest, for in his heart he envied One Eye Kerrigan the adventure which must have preceded the possession of the pearls. For money Bill cared less than the majority of men. He owned a pearling schooner and a bank account of several hundred pounds.

He needed no more, as he lived for the fun, and not the profit. That it had been One Eye Kerrigan, and not he, who had found a lagoon or a secret which had baffled the efforts of pearlers and men of science for decades, made Bill feel worse than the loss of an opportunity to be rich. He drained his beer and thrust a quid of fine cut chewing tobacco into his cheek.

The big head with its thatch of curly coppery-gold hair lifted. The shoulders, wide enough to block a door, shrugged. Bill wore only duck trousers and a thin cotton singlet. In the lamplight the serpents and dragons which covered his torso from throat to waist seemed to writhe as though tattooers, Chinese, Malay, European and Polynesian, had endowed the art of their needle with life.

After all, Bill implied by the shrug, he had had his fun. Let One Eye keep his money. Much good it would do the dirty old reprobate!

A sudden murmur of excited voices from the direction of the hotel came to his ears, but he did not move. He would go on collecting pearl shell, he supposed, and wait with what patience he could for the next unusual event.

Pearl shell—s h i m m e r i n g stuff brought by grinning brown men who could stay three minutes under water; romantic, exciting stuff that gave Bill an excuse for poking his schooner into the most out-of-the-way corners of the South Pacific.

For him pearl shell was a means, a door that might lead to an opportunity for the excitement he loved; and yet, in the eyes of the traders to whom he sold it, it was just so much merchandise that could be sold for a thousand a ton in Philadelphia, and which eventually became buttons and knife handles. Pearling was a prosaic business, after all.

THE door of the *estaminet* burst open. The doctor who had been attending Kerrigan ran excitedly into the room. "Bill, One Eye wants to see you," he panted.

"Yeah, I'll bet he does!" boomed the pearler robustly. Bill's voice was as big as all the rest of him. The deep tones reverberated through the empty *estaminet* like the grumble of a brass drum tapped gently with the fingers. "He was afraid of me while he had his health. Now that he's passing out, he wants to spit in my face."

"It's the wish of a dying man," reproved the physician.

"Oh, I'm coming all right," Bill rumbled. "Let the mean old devil have his fun! I can stand it, but just don't think I expect anything from One Eye but dirt."

He rose, stretching. The doctor, however, on fire with suspense and impatience, snatched eagerly at his arm. Outside the *estaminet* Bill was dragged along at a trot. As they entered the hotel the crowd closed in behind him, and poured on his heels into the sick room.

The shuffle of many feet on the bare wooden floor brought Kerrigan out of a stupor. The one eye opened and fixed itself on Bill.

"Pencil—paper," Kerrigan whispered.

They were thrust into his hands. With his last strength he scrawled half a dozen figures, folded the paper, and handed it to Bill.

"In a deep pool by a lava cliff all pitted with blow holes," Kerrigan whispered. Every word was audible, for the crowd held its breath. "The oysters are all in one spot. Big shells lying on the clean black sand in six fathoms of water. You're the one I want to go after them, Bill. A child could get them up, and you claim to be a man."

The whisper ended in a fit of coughing, and Kerrigan sank down against the pillow. The skin of the skull-like face had a purple tint. He was so weak that a grimace meant as a sneer became a horrible and meaningless twist of the lips.

"Look at it," whispered Kerrigan. "I know you, Bill. You'll—go!"

Bill glanced at the scrawl:

20-16-18 136-37-42

Though latitude south and longitude west were omitted, the position given was most exact. From his detailed knowledge of the South Seas, Bill could locate the approximate locality. It was some small island just beyond the limits of the trade winds, and therefore remote from the usual track of pearling skippers and island traders. He refolded the paper and stuck it into his pocket.

"You're right, I'll go! But why pick on me, One Eye?" he asked joyously, and bent to the lips of the dying man to catch the answer. Kerrigan was failing fast.

"Because I—hate you!" came the whisper. "The devils—that got my crew—will get you. For you'll go, you fool! Bellow Bill, *he* ain't afraid of nothing—"

The sardonic whisper ended in a choking gurgle. Kerrigan shuddered, and was still. An expression of vicious satisfaction was fixed on the purplish features immovable in death. The doctor thrust Bill back.

"He's gone," said the physician; but with his professional duty finished, curiosity could no longer be restrained. "Did he know what he was saying, do you think? Does the position he wrote for you seem to be that of a real island?"

The doctor had not heard One Eye's last words. Like the crowd, he could not understand why Bill's face should be grim as well as eager.

"One Eye knew exactly what he was

doing, and sized me up dead right," Bill rumbled. "Out of my way, now, lads. I'm saying less about these pearls than One Eye himself—for much better reasons."

CHAPTER II.

SECRETS ARE HARD TO KEEP.

BILL spoke confidently enough, but he knew the crowd would never permit him to walk out with the paper in his pocket. Had he been armed—had he not been jammed in a crowd with men touching both elbows—he might have tried to burn One Eye's scrawl. Once the paper was out of his pocket, however, it would be snatched from his hands.

He stood still, seemingly irresolute, really stimulated by the danger and the intense battle of wits to come. He lived for such moments. His chance was to turn the furious greed of the crowd that hemmed him in to his own ends, as a boat utilizes the force and fury of a barrier of surf to bear it over the obstacle.

Bill faced scoundrels who would knife him without hesitation for a glance at the paper he carried; honest citizens with personality and standing enough to weld the mob into a unit and insist that he read the secret aloud.

Bellow Bill began to smile—the smile of a boxer in the ring.

Let either faction try!

The individuals in the crowd were known to him. By the door Perrault, the spade-bearded buyer of pearls, stood with mouth half open, scowling in indecision. There was the leader of the honest faction—fortunately, a slow-witted man.

The rascals had already worked their way closer to the bed. Next to Bill stood "Fatty" Clarke, a hogshead of gross, sweating flesh. Hairless arms burned a light pink by the sun were crossed over the rolls of soft fat draped across the enormous chest. A head shorter than Bill's six feet and two inches of hard muscle.

Fatty's mere bulk barred his exit. Three hundred pounds of fat cannot be shoved aside. Fatty also thought slowly, but the piggish eyes were buried in the bloated cheeks, crisscrossed with the blue veins of dissipation.

Fatty's plan was already settled. The position he had chosen, near the bed and beside the open window, seemed part of it. He was waiting—and Bill waited, too, tensed for the first word or movement in the crowd.

"Twist" Keith, Fatty's partner, edged toward the open window. Twist was little and sun-dried and lame. His left foot was twisted inward, so that he swung it sidewise, but despite that, he was sinewy and active enough. In height he barely reached five feet, and his weight never exceeded a hundred pounds, but few men were more feared by the natives or granted more respect by white men.

Twist was dangerous, and quick as a hungry tomcat. Even Bill, who was expecting some movement, was caught aback by the suddenness of his actions.

A gun jabbed Bill's spine. Another flashed beneath his arm and was leveled at the face of the nearest man, who flung himself backward with an oath.

"Git back—git back, all!" Twist snarled.

The crowd knew he would shoot. A few in the rear continued to shove, but those in front fought to widen a space between themselves and the muzzle of his gun.

Fatty drew a revolver.

"Right against the wall!" he shouted.

"Gimme that paper!" Twist commanded. "Move slow, Bill!"

Bill moved very slowly. He wadded the paper into a ball between his fingers before taking it from his pocket, intending to snap it through the open window, but Twist was alert. He pocketed one gun, leaving Fatty to cover the crowd, and seized Bill's wrist. The bony fingers snatched the crumpled paper, popped it into his mouth. Twist's lame leg swung over the window sill.

THE crowd growled. From the window to the ground was a drop of less than ten feet, but they dared not rush Fatty. A thud told that Twist had landed.

"Keep away from that door," said Fatty thickly.

Sweat was pouring in streams from his bloated face, for the strain of maintaining the drop upon so many was tremendous. He could not hold them long. His purpose was to give his partner a start.

Bill measured the distance to the window and waited for Fatty to direct all his attention to those in front. The instant the fat neck shifted, Bill caught the sides of the window and flung himself feet first through the opening. He fell heavily.

Above him burst a concerted roar, and heads thrust through the window. Evidently his diversion had cost Fatty the drop.

But before any one else could follow his example Bill was sprinting down the road toward the harbor. He led his nearest pursuer by as much as Twist led him, and he was positive the lame little man would make straight for Fatty's schooner. At worst, the race for the pearls would be confined to two boats. With luck, he might catch Twist before he reached the beach and prevent him from reading the paper at all.

Twist, however, had made too good use of his start. As Bill sprinted out onto the beach, a dugout was moving away from the shore and the flare of a match lighted the lame man's emaciated features.

Behind Bill sounded the shouts and footfalls of running men. He did not hesitate. Trusting to the darkness to conceal him, he ran straight into the surf and swam in the wake of the dugout.

Of course, he was distanced. The two Marquesan divers who worked with Twist and Fatty were plying paddles with all their strength, and they gained two hundred yards in the three that separated the schooner from the beach. Before Twist could get under way, however, he would have a cable to slip and a mainsail to hoist, and that he had perceived the swimmer behind him was altogether unlikely.

The halyard blocks were still squealing when Bill swam under the schooner's stern. He could guess that the two divers were swaying on the tackles, but Twist's location was highly problematical. Though Bill could reach up and catch the low rail of the schooner, the movement would alarm any one at the wheel, where Twist would probably be located.

Nevertheless, that was a risk Bill had to take. He came out of the water with a leap and a kick, hauling himself over the rail with all the strength of his arms, and tumbling head first onto the deck.

By the binnacle light he glimpsed Twist. The latter yelled to his divers,

dropped the wheel, and pawed for his gun. Bill caught him by the ankle and jerked him to the deck.

Once down, the little man was as helpless as a child before the pearler's strength. Bill twisted the gun out of his hand and flung it overboard, punched once and felt the emaciated body go limp under the blow. Then the two divers leaped upon him.

Had they been white men wearing shoes, Bill would never have risen, but their bare heels only hurt him without crippling. He caught their legs and dragged them down upon him. The three rolled across the deck, biting, kicking and punching, while over their heads the main boom slatted to and fro and wild yells from the shore indicated that the pursuing crowd had taken renewed heart, and would soon be off in any boat they could find.

BOTH Marquesan divers were big and powerful men, but the native of the South Seas fights like a cat —with nails and teeth. Bill was bitten. Fingers gouged at his eyes, and the two fought so well together that for a desperate minute all he could do was to roll over and over, keeping them all in the comparatively open deck and avoiding the disaster of being penned between the after cabin and the rail, where one diver could hold him while the other found some sort of club.

Purposefully he fought to get one arm free. Their biting hurt abominably. Bill flung himself on his back, glimpsed a curly head against the whiteness of the mainsail, and swung. His fist landed on the point of a chin, and that diver promptly ceased from troubling.

With considerable relish Bill started after the one who had been doing the biting. He caught his second enemy by the throat, held him while he got up, and, still holding him, swung for the jaw. The blow knocked the Marquesan ten feet. His head struck against the after cabin with a thwack that made the big pearler feel much better.

Bill stooped over Twist, found and pocketed the second gun, and started to search for the paper. It was not in the trousers pockets. Twist was coming to, so Bill got a bucket of water and flung it in his face.

"Ain't you got no respect for a last will and testament? Where's that note?" he demanded.

Twist groaned and dragged himself to a sitting posture, his back against the binnacle.

"Hell, Bill, you damn near broke my jaw," he complained. "I didn't mean to pick on you. I thought One Eye was going to pass the word to some fathead like Perrault. Worked it pretty neat, didn't I?"

"Next time muzzle your divers. Biting's uncomfortable," objected Bill, who was still sore. "Where's that note, I said?"

The lame little man pulled a sodden ball of paper out of the waistband of his trousers. Bill threw it overboard.

"Twenty degrees, sixteen minutes and eighteen seconds south latitude, one hundred thirty-six degrees, thirty-seven minutes, and forty-two seconds west longitude," Twist quoted sarcastically. "Too bad I got a good memory for figures, ain't it, Bill? Lots of men, just glancing at that by match light, might have forgotten it. Know of any volcanic island down that way? I don't."

"Damned if you ain't a cheerful cuss! So you're going, too, huh?" Bellow Bill renewed his chew, and spat thoughtfully over the rail. "I ought to steal your schooner and take you

along—except that three men in irons ain't cheerful company," he remarked. "I suppose you'd plug me if you still had this gun and I knew so much."

"Not me. That'd be Fatty's speed. He's the lad for the rough stuff," Twist contradicted. "I do the thinking and he the dirt. Suits us both perfect. However"—he h e s i t a t e d—"what are you going to do, Bill?"

"Cut up your running rigging and swim over to my schooner. I can't keep you from following, but I'll get there first."

"Correct. In that case I'll wait and pick up Fatty—which I didn't intend to do," said Twist shamelessly. "He's handy in case of trouble. There's something queer about this."

"There's a boat putting out from shore."

Twist trimmed the sheet and took the wheel. The schooner gathered way through the water.

"I'LL sail out to sea and then back by your schooner, Bill," he remarked. "Neither of us wants to let anybody else in on this game. You can spoil my running rigging anywhere. Bill, we might go partners."

"You'd double cross your own mother."

"Correct," Twist admitted. "I'd like to slip one over on Bellow Bill Williams, too. We little shrimps have got our pride. But even if we're going to scrap, I'd like to swap one bit of info. Have you noticed that position is worked out in *seconds?* Now, One Eye was a rotten navigator, even for an island skipper. Do you work out your sights as fine as that, Bill?"

The big pearler shook his head. Twist was right in saying he had not noticed this point; in fact, Bill had memorized the position only to the nearest minute. A minute of latitude and longitude is roughly a mile of distance, which is close enough for all practical purposes.

"You don't and neither do I," Twist went on. "Yet we're good navigators. Therefore, I don't think One Eye worked the position. He copied it."

"From whom?" Bill asked sharply.

"That's what I want to know. My guess is, from the man who made him turn those figures over to you."

"Somebody made One Eye do me a favor? That's rot!"

Twist swung the helm over and pointed the schooner back toward the beach.

"Something had scared him. I never saw a face like his, and I've tried hard," Twist muttered. "Well, I guess we'll find out. Don't cut up my running rigging too bad, Bill, or I'll follow in another schooner and you'll have twice as many callers."

As Twist steered toward Bill's vessel the pearler was busy with a knife. When he dived over the side he left a boat that would require several hours' work before it would be fit for sea.

Twist steered toward the anchorage he had left, while Bill swam toward his own schooner. Several dugouts were still paddling around the beach, and the pearler half expected to find one or more of his rivals from Fakarava waiting on board his boat. If so, it was his intention to kick them off, now that the secret of One Eye's island was no longer on record.

When Bill drew himself aboard, however, he found the deck of his ship empty except for his native diver, Kory, a Fijian, who had sailed with him all over the world.

Kory was a powerful six-footer, almost as black as a negro. His face was disfigured, according to white man's

standards, by a broad band of blue tattoo marks which ran from his ears around his nose like a mask. Abnormally keen of sight and hearing, he had observed Bill's approach through the water, but not a muscle of the savage face moved when the pearler swung himself over the rail. Curiosity was not one of Kory's weaknesses.

"White fella wait along you," he announced.

"All right. Get under way. Move seven bells, you savvy?" Bill snapped, for he was in a hurry. "What name white fella?"

"Him stranger along me. Asleep cabin belong schooner," replied Kory imperturbably, as he moved forward to break out the anchor and hoist sail.

BILL smelled a rat. If a white stranger was aboard, where was his boat? Kory, after all, did not know all the white men in Fakarava by sight. Bill took Twist's revolver out of his pocket—even though the cartridges were wet it would make a good club—and went down the companionway stairs in one leap.

Under a lighted hurricane lamp a tall, lean man of thirty, with jet black eyes and hair, well dressed in white ducks, had stretched out in Bill's chair with a solar topee on his knee. The dark eyes widened at the sight of the pearler's dripping garments and the drawn revolver, but the stranger made no move to rise.

"Say, is every one crazy to-night?" he inquired in a soft drawl. "Ah'm Allan Montross, of San Francisco and Birmingham, Alabama, captain. If yo're Captain Williams, yo' can put up that gun."

"What do you want? I'm sailing at once," rumbled Bellow Bill, yet in spite of his annoyance he could not help grinning. He liked this stranger who was so unflustered and so sure of himself.

"My wish exactly, suh," nodded Montross. "Ah've found this town a madhouse. Ah came to find a certain Captain Kerrigan, and was info'med he had just died. Since he seemed to have turned over some papers to you, Ah came down to yo' boat. Yo' black there kept us off with a Winchester rifle."

"Didn't seem to succeed very well," Bill grinned.

"No, suh. Ah believed he wouldn't shoot, and the othahs allowed that he would. Ah was ready to take certain chances, suh, as you will understand, since you were in Captain Kerrigan's confidence."

Bellow Bill uttered a noncommittal grunt.

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded.

"Take me to Montross Island, suh."

"Never heard of it!"

"My father's island, suh!" insisted the young man with obvious surprise. "Perhaps the name he gave it hasn't been put on the charts, captain, but it's a small volcanic peak in latitude twenty degrees, sixteen minutes and eighteen seconds south and longitude one hundred thirty-six, thirty-seven, forty-two west."

Bill could only stare. In the cabin the quiet was so profound he was conscious of the loud ticking of the clock against the wall.

"Did you mention that position ashore?" Bill asked evenly.

"No, suh. Merely asked fo' Montross Island."

"That happens to be our port." Grim amusement flitted across Bill's

face. "Does your father happen to be a devil, Mr. Montross?"

CHAPTER III.

SUSPICION.

MONTROSS ISLAND proved to be a precipitous and wave-carved crag of black volcanic rock rising out of a maze of coral reefs which made approach by schooner hazardous. At first sight there appeared to be no harbor. The surf boiled over the coral and hurled itself into the caves with which the soft black rock was honeycombed.

From seaward the sound of the waves, instead of being the normal boom of surf, was a hollow, coughing roar, and Bellow Bill would have hesitated to thrust his ship into the grip of the currents that boiled along the base of the cliffs if the horizon behind had not been notched by another sail.

Though Bill had won the race from Fakarava, the schooner owned by Twist and Fatty was scarcely an hour behind him, and therefore he sailed boldly through the passage among the reefs which looked most promising.

Close inshore a break in the cliffs was revealed; through it Bellow Bill steered into a landlocked harbor which had been at one time the crater of a volcano. Almost perfectly circular, and about a quarter of a mile in diameter, cliffs of the same soft, honeycombed black rock from fifty to seventy-five feet in height ringed it around. Almost directly opposite the entrance there had been a landslide, and on this slope cocopalms and other vegetation had taken root, but elsewhere there was deep water up to the very face of the cliffs.

The water of the harbor was as still as a sheet of black glass. The cliff kept off the trade wind, and although Bill's topsails occasionally caught a puff of breeze sufficient to give the schooner steerage way, the mainsail flapped. The noise filled the harbor with echoes tossed from cliff to cliff. Otherwise there was not a sound. The dark shore and the dark water were awesome. The place seemed to hold its breath and brood evil.

"No sign of your father," said Bill, speaking softly for once. "No house even."

Montross had been sent to the bow to keep a lookout for sunken rocks. He looked aft, his face anxious.

"Ah saw a patch of pearl shell, lyin' close to that steep cliff just to the right of the entrance," he reported. "It's an odd place fo' oysters to be, unless they were dropped there. They're in a thick patch within thirty feet of the cliff, just as One Eye told yo'. Since my father seems to have —succeeded, Kerrigan may have murdered him."

"We'll see," Bill rumbled, and pointed the schooner toward the slope of green where, if anywhere in this eerie place, human beings might be expected to live.

From what the son had told him of the elder Montross's purpose and character, Bill was inclined to believe that One Eye had committed murder, yet that fact did not explain the disappearance of Kerrigan's crew, nor his death-bed reference to a devil which would give him posthumous vengeance on Bellow Bill.

ALLAN'S father, George Montross, B.S., M.A., Ph.D., formerly a professor at the University of California, far from being a devil,

was a distinguished ichthyologist. From the son's accounts Bellow Bill had come to understand the affection which all who came in contact with the bald, black-eyed little scientist, bore toward him, and also their amused appreciation of the professor's eccentricities.

Ichthyology is the science of fishes. Not an exciting subject, yet Professor Montross had studied and taught it with the fanatic intensity of a zealot preaching a new religion. In the classroom the deep-set eyes under the heavy black eyebrows that were the only hair on head and face, would glow as he explained why the trout (*genus Salmo*) has an embryo fin near its tail, whereas, the bass (*genus Roccus*) also inhabiting fresh water, has none.

In the laboratory where he spent every free hour studying his particular specialty—the diseases of crustaceans—working among books and microscopes and tall steel filing-cases in which the professor kept a lifetime of researches under lock and key, his enthusiasm was even more marked.

At the age of sixty-five the university had retired him as professor emeritus, but instead of returning to his native Alabama for a leisurely and pleasant old age Montross had converted his property into cash, packed his scientific instruments, and left for a destination he refused to reveal even to his son.

He held the clew, he said, to a mystery which baffled science. The experiment would require three years, and could not be conducted in the United States. His researches must be in secret, lest he be robbed both of their fruits and of the scientific credit of his discovery.

If there should be any one with him intelligent enough to guess what he was doing... The black eyes gleamed, and the bald head wagged proudly. Of course, Allan would think he was an old fool, but would he give his father his fling? Make no attempt to follow him and bring him back?

And Allan, knowing the lust for discovery that burned in his father, and secretly amused at the old man's eccentric belief that all other scientists were seeking to steal his papers and rob him of the academic credit due him, had consented.

For three years, at six-month intervals, he had received a letter postmarked in Fakarava. The early ones were almost lyric in praise of an ideal spot, ideal assistants, experiments that promised success. In the later letters appeared a growing dread of robbery—a fear that had amused the son, knowing how barren pure science is of value to any save the scientist himself.

And then—the letters had ceased. When nine months passed without news, Allan had come to Fakarava, knowing only the latitude and longitude of the island where his father had worked, and the fact that a Captain Kerrigan had transported his supplies.

But Bellow Bill, during the voyage to Montross Island, had supplied facts that sharpened Allan's fears. A pearl is a deposit of nacre around a microscopic nucleus, which scientists think is a parasite. If the old professor had discovered the nature of the parasite, and found some means of intensifying its action, he had indeed every reason in the world to fear robbery, and, old man that he was, no means of protecting himself save his scientific knowledge.

Book learning is poor defense against a Winchester in the hands of a man who knows how to shoot, and in Bill's opinion One Eye Kerrigan had

guessed the old scientist's object, served him faithfully while the pearls were growing, and then struck.

THE three great pearls proved that the old professor had succeeded. That Kerrigan had returned with only three, and with horror stamped on his vicious face, gave Bill little grounds for the hope that the old man was alive. Kerrigan was the type whose first act would have been to shoot his victim in the back.

Even if the two had been armed equally, a gentle, lovable, and impractical old ichthyologist was no match for a hard-case pearler. Yet out of his thorough knowledge of marine organisms, George Montross must have provided a defense for his treasure which had been effective, and which had impressed the ignorant Kerrigan as supernatural.

Both Allan Montross and Bellow Bill were more concerned with this riddle than with the potentialities of the bed of pearl oysters they had discovered. Bill armed his diver, Kory, with a Winchester and ordered him to protect the schooner. Montross and he took a rifle and a revolver apiece and hastened to row ashore to search the island in the short time that was at their disposal before the arrival of Twist Keith and his fat partner.

Even before setting foot on land they found traces of the professor's work. In the shoal water near the beach were parallel lines of pearl oysters placed a foot apart as plants would be set in a garden, and divided into beds of twenty-four oysters each.

The laboratory or "garden" extended along the beach for a hundred yards, and must have comprised nearly a thousand shells—the collection of which must have been no mean task. The shells were small for the most part, and curiously misshapen and distorted as by disease or the work of marine borers. In the garden was a significant gap. From eight beds the oysters had been removed.

"Do yo' reckon these were dumped into the deep water by the cliff?" Montross suggested.

Bellow Bill reached over the side of the boat and brought up three oysters from the adjacent bed. Opening the shells, he kneaded the meat between his fingers.

"Probably. No pearls in this lot, anyway," he rumbled.

A stroke of the oars sent the boat to the beach, and with his rifle ready for instant use he led the way into the thicket of coconut palms and jungle.

Underfoot there was a dim path. Some time in the past the overhanging vegetation had been cut back, but since this path had been used slender vine tendrils had grown across it, so that Bill had to break his way through with impatient sweeps of a hairy, tattooed arm.

Within a hundred yards the path led to a clearing. Once a house had been here; none of it remained except a square patch of black ashes.

Montross poked in the ruins with the muzzle of his gun, and picked up a microscope blackened by the flames.

"My father would have saved this or picked it from the ashes if he'd been alive at the time of the fire." Montross's eyes were narrow and hard, his face white. "A microscope to him's what a sextant would be to yo', Bill. The damn' murderers! Father wouldn't have harmed a fly! He'd have given them the pearls if they'd left him his papers and the proof of his discovery."

"Steady!" Bill reproved in his deep voice. "Maybe your father was think-

ing of you, buddy. You've told me you weren't rich."

With a frown the big pearler let his eyes wander around the clearing, and suddenly strode to a large garden, mostly overgrown with weeds. His rifle barrel pointed toward a patch of earth recently upturned.

"THE house was burned a week ago at least, but there's been yams dug there within the week!" Bill rumbled.

"Well, Kerrigan didn't have such a long sail!"

"Fact," Bill admitted, and moved toward the edge of the clearing, only to stop, so surprised that he spat out the quid of fine-cut in his cheek with an explosive *pagh!*

Shielded behind a mass of bushes in full bloom, the flowers of which were like a dome of gold, was a grave, well made, well tended, and—wonder of wonders!—with a headstone roughly shaped from a slab of the soft, slag-like volcanic rock of the island.

"Murder be—blowed!" Bill cried out, refilling his cheek with tobacco as Montross ran beside him pointing to the inscription:

Here lies
GEORGE MONTROSS
Scientist
Who Found the Secret
of the Pearl
Born May 6, 1859
Died 1930

The inscription was neatly lettered and deeply cut.

"Your father made that himself. Kerrigan could hardly spell his own name," rumbled Bill.

"Obviously," Montross snapped. "But did my father make that stone to be used here, or is he buried under it? Granted he was sick and expected to die, does that prove he died naturally? If I had a spade I'd open that grave and—"

"Kerrigan was tough," Bill contradicted. "He'd have tossed body and gravestone out into the coral where the devil himself couldn't have found it. No, your father was sick and expecting to die. You'll note he left the day of his death blank, and it hasn't been filled in. Why?"

Montross shrugged.

"Making that stone took weeks," Bill insisted. "It gives me the shivers, a bit. A man old and sick chiseling his own headstone on this damn, black silent island. He knew he'd done something all other scientists were going to brag about him for, and yet he knew he couldn't last long enough to get back to his friends. It's a morbid notion, ain't it? Maybe he knew that Kerrigan would murder him sooner than let him get away with his pearls. Schooners don't touch at this island. Kerrigan could wait. The pearls were getting bigger and bigger. To know my life was in another man's hands, particularly a damn ignorant hard-case devil like One Eye Kerrigan, would give me the willies... Your father had time to cut that stone. What else did he have time to do?"

"What do yo' mean?" Montross demanded.

"Why, he took his good oysters and dumped them in the deep water under the cliff; and in some way he found or trained him a devil," Bill boomed. "I've wondered some whether One Eye wasn't plain out of his head when he died, but I think now he told the strict literal truth out of hate to me. Get a spade and open this grave if you want to, Montross, but I'm going to that honeycombed black cliff and see

what happens when Twist and Fatty spot that shell!"

Faintly through the trees came the echo of rattling blocks as the other schooner sailed through the passage. Bellow Bill loosened his revolver in the holster, felt to see that he had plenty of rifle ammunition, and started off through the underbrush at a run. Montross hesitated only a moment, then followed.

THEY had less than a quarter of a mile to go, but once out on the black rocks the footing was terrible. They climbed over cracked and broken slabs of volcanic slag that cut their light shoes. They circled chasms and blow-holes left as the molten stuff had cooled, looked down into dark, jagged caves, ran across narrow bridges of slag with no time to test their security.

Scratched and panting, they came to the edge of the bay and crawled through a jumble of broken rock to the edge of the cliff.

Below them Twist had brought his schooner to anchor as close to the rock as he dared. He and Fatty stood in the stern. Both had rifles. They were watching Bill's schooner, while amidships one of their two Polynesian divers was preparing to descend. The native had put diver's spectacles over his eyes, hung a bag of netting around his neck to hold the shell, and was drawing a glove on his right hand.

"Ahoy!" Bellow Bill hailed. All around the bay cliffs sent the echo back. "Ahoy—Ahoy—Ahoy!"

Like a flash Twist Keith dropped behind the cabin and poked his rifle upward. Fatty Clarke, too big and too slow-moving to find shelter, looked up like a sweating, angry hog.

"Save your lead, Twist," Bill boomed. "These rocks will stop a bullet a lot better than that cabin roof. Before you let that native dive I'll make you a proposition: I've been over the island, and that shell down there is the stuff we're both after. Furthermore, One Eye Kerrigan was kind enough to tell me there was a devil guarding it, and I'm passing the tip along. One Eye was right."

"You're offering a partnership? Suits us!" barked Twist.

"Like hell! I'm making you a sporting offer!" Bill boomed so loudly that the echoes rolled all around the bay. "One Eye put this job up to me, and I don't want any help at all. So you can hoist your anchor and go back through the reef. When I've got the pearls, you can try to get 'em away from me when my schooner comes out through the passage. Or—send that native over the side, and I'll try to keep you from getting away with whatever you bring up!"

With an awkward leap that would never have saved him if Bill had cared to shoot, Fatty Clarke tumbled down the companionway.

"Dive!" he shouted to the native.

Twist's answer was a shot that flattened against the rock near Bill's head. The second diver leaped for the fo'c's'le scuttle and disappeared; the first plunged into the water.

Despite Bill's advantage of position, the raiders' chances of getting away with the shell were excellent. The diver could rise on the opposite side of the schooner, perfectly safe from Bill's bullets. The anchor could be unshackled under water, and the schooner would then drift with the tide through the passage, while Twist, partially sheltered by the cabin, could sling enough lead to keep Bill from taking careful aim.

Bellow Bill, however, did not answer the shot. From the shelter of a slab of lava he could look straight down and follow the movements of the diver, which the others could not. The native was swimming toward the bottom and had almost reached the shell when from the base of the cliff spurted a black discharge which covered the bottom for ten yards in every direction with a cloud as impenetrable as ink.

THE stuff was like the ink discharged by a cuttlefish, but, if a cuttlefish produced it, the size of the monster was enormous. The deep sea animals upon which sperm whales feed might have produced such a cloud. Their tentacles are thick as a man's leg, and their parrot-like beaks rip deeply into the flesh of a whale.

Even the sperm whale, despite its enormous jaws and teeth, finds this monstrous squid no mean adversary. They live in the warm depths of the tropic seas, but— This water was warm enough, and through the narrow pass between the cliffs the tide would bear all manner of food.

Bill shuddered. There was no way to verify his suspicion—nothing but a black cloud spreading in an ever-widening circle from the base of the cliff. Two minutes, three passed, but of the diver there was no sign.

"Twist! I won't shoot! Look over the side, quick!" Bill shouted.

The lame little man obeyed instantly. From a porthole Clarke stuck his head, while Bellow Bill and Montross leaned far over the cliff edge. They stared while the dark cloud drifted slowly away with the tide, revealing first the scattered pearl shells, and in the midst of them, the body of the diver, lying limply on the dark sand.

The sun was just touching the cliffs, and as they stared a shadow seemed to fall across the bay, but in the last clear light Bill saw the red stain of blood in the water around the body.

"Get him up, Twist—but use a grapnel!" called the pearler.

Without a word Twist obeyed. After a little fishing, the three-pronged hook caught in the bag the diver had worn around his neck. Twist hoisted the body over the rail. In the stomach Bill could see a horrible wound.

"Something's cut him half in two."

Fatty Clarke, however, was fumbling with the diver's neck bag. The diver had caught one shell. Glaring defiance at Bill, Clarke opened it—and heaved himself erect, holding a pearl as large as the end of his thumb.

Twist's emaciated features turned to stone. "*All* the shells must hold them," he snarled under his breath, and added, still sharply, "You were watching, Bill. What was it?"

"One Eye named it," rumbled the pearler. "Are you ready to go outside the reef and wait for me?"

Twist looked up.

"Think you got a monopoly on nerve? No!" he sneered. He picked up his rifle and laid it in plain sight on the cabin top. "I'm going to work right out on this deck, where you can plug me if you want," he challenged, and the lean face blazed. "Go outside? *Why, that one pearl is worth a hundred pounds!*"

CHAPTER IV.

TWO KINDS OF CHANCE.

"FOR a little guy, Twist Keith's quite a fellow!" Bill rumbled aside to Montross, and stretched himself out more comfort-

ably behind his slab of lava, his chin in one tattooed fist, his jaws moving comfortably.

That his bluff had been called did not disturb the big pearler in the least. Less than half an hour of daylight was left, and he was content to postpone his own activities, while his rivals took the offensive against—whatever it was.

Twist moved his schooner nearer the cliff and anchored by a cable that could easily be slipped. He then prepared a bomb of six sticks of dynamite wrapped in canvas and twine and attached to a weight. Cutting a long fuse, he tossed the contraption at the cliff, so that it sank near the point from which the dark clouds had been ejected.

The cliff trembled to the heavy explosion, and a column of water deluged the schooner's decks. Bellow Bill, however, could see little signs of damage. A few pieces of rock had been torn from the cliff, but the shock of the explosion, which must have been terrific beneath the water, had not caused the creature to hurl out its inky cloud.

Twist, however, was satisfied.

"That 'll kill whatever it was!" he exclaimed loudly, and came limping aft, while Clarke squeezed his fat body into the fo'c's'le hatch. As Twist reached the cabin he whipped up his rifle and covered the Polynesian diver.

"Down you go, Mapiao!" he grated.

"Pearl belong one fella devil! He *kai-kai* belly belong me!" the diver wailed.

"Gun *kai-kai* heart belong you," barked Twist inflexibly.

"He won't—he can't do that!" Montross gasped.

"The hell he won't! One Eye did!" growled Bill, taking swift aim.

His bullet knocked a long splinter from the cabin close to Twist's head. The little man only dodged behind the mainmast.

"Down, Mapiao!" he grated.

The diver gave a sob, and leaped from the rail. He did not dive, however. Once under water where the bullet could not reach him he turned and swam five feet below the surface, parallel to the cliff and in the direction of Bellow Bill's schooner. Twist cursed aloud.

"The 'devil' took no notice of that!" reported Bill excitedly. "The diver has got to get down where the pearls are. One Eye, y' see, could follow his divers in a boat and keep them from swimming away. A man to a pearl!"

Bill spat out his squid in savage disgust.

"Ahoy, Twist!" he called. "Come out from behind that mast and take a dive yourself—or send down Fatty. I won't hinder!"

The answer was a rattle of chain as the schooner slipped her cable.

"Can't you swim?" Bill shouted with grim sarcasm.

The schooner drifted slowly away from the cliff with the tide. Beyond rifle shot Twist hobbled forward and threw overboard another anchor. Already the twilight was dark in the bay. The sun had dipped below the horizon, and in the western sky stars leaped into being, serene and distant and peaceful. Over the bay silence rested.

"OUR turn now," Bellow Bill whispered. "We got to get Twist's schooner. That pearl set him crazy. I've got to count on you for a hell of a lot—"

"Going to row out and board?" Montross interrupted coolly.

"Be shot before we laid hands on the rail. Kory'd do as much for Twist. Neither of them will be asleep. No, we got to improvise. Can you find your way back to our schooner without breaking your neck?"

"In time."

"Then bring me a coil of thin rope, the life preserver, and a diver's knife. I'm going fishing for that devil. If we could just find out what it is—"

Bill began to chuckle deep in his chest, and in the dark the sound was like the deep bass purr of a giant cat.

"I see why One Eye picked on me," he rumbled. "The mean old hellion sized me up pretty well. And there's Twist, trying to horn in and make me out a false alarm. Don't hurry, buddy. We got the whole night for this job."

While Montross made the slow trip to the schooner and back Bill lay on the cliff in perfect silence. His vigilance was unrewarded. There was no sound but the faint, hollow roar of the surf in the caves on the seaward shore of the island, and no suspicious movement in the harbor or the water below the cliff.

Like most lagoons in the South Seas, the harbor water was faintly phosphorescent. Fish that broke water left a circle of pale blue light on the glassy surface. When Montross pulled from the beach, Bill could follow his progress by the fiery drops shaken from the oar blades, and hear him hail Kory. By the same means he was positive that no boat had left Twist's schooner.

Montross returned at last. Bill tied the life preserver to the end of the rope and stuck the diver's knife into his belt.

"Give me half an hour to climb down the cliff, then drop that life preserver overboard and keep bouncing it up and down in the water," he instructed. "Something may come investigating to see what all the splashing is about."

Before Montross could protest he swung himself over the face of the cliff.

Though the rock was nearly as steep as the side of a house, the lava was so seamed with cracks and pitted with blow holes that Bill reached a narrow shelf just above the waters of the bay in half the time he had allowed. The splash of the lifebuoy as it fell drenched him. At his feet a flaming commotion began in the water.

He crouched, gripping his knife, and though long experience and many tight corners had schooled his nerves, his jaws moved faster than their custom. The tentacle of a devil fish, grasping for the decoy, might touch him. Other tentacles might pluck him from the rock. His knife would be useless against a monster, the beak of which could rip a man's body in half.

Thus whispered nerves strained by silence and suspense. Stubbornly Bill's mind told him that the octopus and cuttlefish both use tentacles first, and their beaks last.

In the depths below nothing stirred, but as ripples thrown by the movement of the buoy sent phosphorescent ripples in ever-widening circles a boat left Twist's schooner and sculled toward the cliff.

Bill slipped off trousers and shoes. Powerful swimmer though he was, he hated to trust himself to that black water, but as the boat approached within a hundred feet he lowered himself from his perch.

He made no splash, and the movement of the buoy concealed any ripples of his making. Once under water he swam with all his strength below the

surface, guided by the phosphorescence ahead.

IN the boat Fatty Clarke was preparing to touch a match to the fuse of a second bomb. On the cliff top Montross screamed a warning to Bill and dropping the rope, seized a rifle.

Bill was almost to the boat. He rose beneath it, seized the gunwale, and capsized Fatty and his unlighted bomb into the bay. The huge man shouted as the boat went over, rose thrashing and kicking, and then screamed a shrill cry cut with pain and terror in sharp contrast to his bellow of rage.

From the cliff top a bullet cut into the water within a yard of Bill, who was blocked by the boat in his efforts to reach Fatty.

Flinging himself across the keel, Bill struck Fatty with the hilt of his knife. As the blow fell he realized to his surprise that the huge man was already insensible, and seized him by the hair. Another bullet plopped into the water.

"It's me!" Bill bellowed.

"Then that devil followed right at yo' heels!" shouted Montross. "Yo' were all three together; something came back—under water both ways! It went under the cliff again."

Bill drew Fatty across the boat.

"Ahoy, Twist!" he hailed. "Your pardner's hurt, and I didn't do it! I'm swimming to your schooner."

What sort of reception the lame little man prepared for him Bill did not care much at that moment. The boat was far too small to keep two heavy men out of the water, and Bill's toes tingled out of dread of something rising from below.

Taking Fatty's head in the crook of his arm he swam toward the schooner at the best speed he could make. Every yard away from the cliff eased his mind, however, and when he touched the low side of the schooner he was alert. Twist would use this opportunity to the utmost.

The little man leaned over the rail, and even in the starlight Bill saw a revolver in his hand. The pearler sank low in the water, sheltering his own head behind that of Fatty.

"Lift him up!" Twist barked.

"Think I'm a derrick?" Bill snorted. "He's fainted. Lean down and hold his head above water while I climb aboard. You're too much of a shrimp to lift him."

The revolver barrel poised in the starlight. Bill sank till only his mouth and nose were above water.

"Go on!" he growled. "Grab him, or I'll let him sink and I'll swim away like Mapiao."

"I'll give you a rope," said Twist smoothly.

"You will like Billy-be-damned! Think I'm going to give you a decent shot at me?" Bill taunted. "Grab his hair! He's hurt bad, but I don't think enough of him to let you get a shot at me!"

The contest was of wits and speed, the hand against the eye, and both knew it. Like a flash Twist stopped, covering with his revolver the hand that reached for Fatty's head.

Bill went completely under water. His hand swung over Fatty's head, caught Twist's wrist. With feet braced against the schooner's hull Bill flung himself backward, pulling Twist over the rail and into the phosphorescent water.

A revolver shot burned Bill's wrist, the bullet seared like hot iron across his arm, but once under the surface he twisted the weapon away from the weaker man and rose, holding Twist

by the throat, and supporting Fatty with his other hand.

"NOW be good!" he gasped. Giving Twist a final shake, he released both, and pulled himself aboard the schooner. To catch a rope and toss it to the struggling pair in the water took only an instant.

"Come on aboard, Twist," Bill chuckled. "Mapiao's waiting ashore, if you're thinking of swimming. He might like to see you!"

With an oath the little man surrendered. He swam to the rail and climbed aboard, silent, but radiating an anger that Bill could feel.

Despite the 'pearler's watchfulness the fight between them might not have been at an end except that the sight of Clarke, when they lifted him aboard, drove personal enmity from the minds of both. On the huge, hairless leg between thigh and knee was a gaping wound that pumped blood in a stream which must be stanched at once.

Bill picked Clarke up and carried him toward the cabin. Twist hobbled ahead. He had the medicine chest open, bandages out, and a surgeon's needle threaded with catgut in his hand before Bill staggered in with his burden.

Both were expert in the treatment of wounds. They drew the flesh together, put in stitches, applied compresses and bandages, then faced each other beside the blood-stained bunk.

"Well?" purred Bill.

Twist's lean features hardened. "I'd fight any man living, but not this thing! That bomb this afternoon killed every fish in the water within a hundred yards. Did you notice that?"

Bill nodded.

"I'll sail out of here to-night, and I won't wait outside the reef, either," Twist continued violently. "I've thought I was a hell of a guy! I was the bird that got the dope from One Eye, away from everybody, and I was going to show you where to head in at." A grimace, bitter and self-contemptuous, crossed the lean face. "I wouldn't go into that water myself for a hundred pearls, and now I'm cooled off, I wouldn't send Mapiao in either. That was Fatty's idea. I done the work because he was too big to take shelter on deck."

Again Bill nodded.

"Well, help me hoist anchor," Twist snapped. "Bring Mapiao with you—if you come. It *is* a devil, Bill. I've seen the marks. Even a shark can't make wounds like those. If you've got any brains—as you'll admit I have—you'll sail right along with me!"

"I don't mind being called a fool. Maybe I am." Bill's great voice filled the tiny cabin like the drone of a deep organ note. His eyes shone, grim, and still eager. "If it was just the pearls, the way it is with you, Twist, I'd go. Only One Eye Kerrigan put it up to me, you see." Bill smiled almost apologetically, went on:

"I don't take backwater from any man, alive or dead. What's more, there was a nice old duffer that was smart enough to make those pearls, and a pretty decent kid that owns them. Are they going to get nothing because I've got a yellow streak?"

"Damned if I'm yellow!" Twist snarled.

"You sent a brown boy; you wouldn't follow yourself," Bill accused. "This thing ain't like anything I know in the sea or out of it, but I don't put much stock in devils. This 'devil' ain't a fish, or your dynamite would have killed it. It might be some kind of octopus, which could have

crawled out of water in some cave behind the face of that cliff, but I can't be sure. So—neither of us will sail, Twist. Instead of raising your anchor, I'm going to lock some handcuffs on you."

Twist stared.

"No hard feelings," Bill rumbled. "Just want to have you off my mind for twelve hours. You can look after Fatty in irons, and later he or somebody can file the irons off."

"But what's the idea?"

"Why, I mean to make sure about this business, that's all. I got a guess, and in case I should be wrong I want some one around that can navigate young Montross back to Fakarava."

CHAPTER V.

BILL MAKES SURE.

TO Montross himself, however, the big pearler was less frank. Throughout the remainder of the night and the following afternoon Bellow Bill spoke and acted as though he were carrying out his previous plans instead of improvising a new and more daring one.

Bill liked to play a lone hand. He preferred risks, provided he could take them himself, to argument.

With Allan Montross the object of the expedition was to discover the fate that had overtaken his father, and to bring back the proof of the professor's scientific attainments.

Bill's desire was to solve the mystery of a "devil" which had already taken four lives, and which would, unless solved, take a larger and larger toll among the more daring and unscrupulous pearlers, who would go to any lengths while the pearls remained at the foot of the cliff.

That he was unusually daring or reckless did not enter Bill's head. What success he had had in the past arose from the promptness with which he took the risks that his rivals avoided, confronting the difficulties that balked them.

Audacity—always audacity — was his creed: he merely took care that his own acts did not involve his companions if he chanced to fail.

Therefore, after ironing Twist Keith, Bill swam back to the island. He gave the cliff a wide berth, shouting across the water for Montross to return to the schooner, and, after much more shouting, persuading Mapiao to come aboard also. All three ate and dropped into their bunks, exhausted.

Bill slept until noon, and then sailed his schooner close to the dark cliff, anchoring in the same spot which Twist had occupied the previous day, and preparing the same kind of dynamite bomb, though its fuse was considerably shorter.

With this in his hand and a cigar glowing between his teeth, Bill came on deck. He was barefoot, dressed in a cotton singlet, and duck trousers cut off at the knee, into the waistband of which he had thrust a diver's knife. Montross, Mapiao, and his own diver, Kory, crowded around him.

"Kory, you fright devil belong pearls?" he demanded.

"Belly belong me walk about—fright big bit too much," answered the Fijian emphatically, squirming in expressive pantomime, while Mapiao's tobacco-colored countenance grew ashen at the prospect that he might be ordered to dive again.

Bellow Bill had expected exactly this.

"Guess it's your job, then, Montross," he announced cheerfully. "I

want you to dive down toward that shell as if you were going to pick them up, savvy? But halfway down, you turn and swim straight away from shore like the devil was after you—which it will be, see? The ink that 'devil' squirts out blinds it, and I'll drop this little firecracker right on top of it."

"Ah reckon that will work," said the Alabaman coolly. "The devil don't swim very fast. Last night I saw a glow in the water moving out from the cliff which was you, though Ah didn't know it then. Right behind yo' was another glow, just the same kind, only moving a little faster than yo' were. Ah'll be frank, Bill: Ah ain't goin' too close to the bottom."

A SMILE of excitement twitched Bill's lips as the dark-haired young man poised on the rail in the sunlight. The pearler's broad chest rose and fell with deep, quiet inhalations.

As Montross dived Bill laid the bomb on the deck; it had served its purpose in fooling Montross. Snapping the glowing cigar into the water, he poised on the schooner's rail, knees bent and arms outstretched.

The inky cloud shot from the cliff face, rolling toward Montross like a billow of black smoke. Montross instantly checked his descent, whirled, and swam desperately to keep in advance of it. Above, Bellow Bill whipped out his knife—and dived straight for the face of the cliff.

The dive took Bill into the heart of the cloud. When he opened his eyes under water a bandage seemed pressed upon them, but he swam straight ahead and not far below the surface. He wanted to pass above the "devil."

When his fingers scraped the cliff he swam downward, feeling for the rock at every stroke. Down he went for twenty, thirty, forty feet before the hand that groped for the rock touched nothing.

Bill twisted toward the cliff, swinging the knife before him in wide arcs as though he were cutting his way through the darkness.

As he had suspected, near the bottom of the cliff an underwater cave led backward. How far, or to what, he could not guess, but he was in the lair of the "devil," while the devil itself was outside, groping for the escaping Montross in the center of the inky cloud.

Again Bill's fingers scraped stone. This time he swam upward. Already he had been under water for a minute. His lungs hurt. The cave might be entirely filled with water. Bill swam upward, ten, twenty, thirty feet.

Suddenly the darkness before his eyes turned to greenish gray. Through unstained water his head rose into air. He was in a cave. The wall of rock he had used to guide himself ended in a shelf ten feet wide and a foot above the water level.

Bill sprang out and crouched, knife in hand.

Overhead, the roof of the cave was lost in darkness. How far it extended to the sides he did not observe at the moment. The light came through a narrow blow-hole extending through the cliff. He caught a glimpse of his own schooner; then bent over the dark surface of the pool.

He was in the "devil's" lair. Cuttlefish, devilfish, or as he suspected, man, Bill was prepared for a fight in which he now held the advantage.

The surface of the pool stirred. On the water appeared a green and brown mass a yard in area, resembling sea-

weed to Bill's horrified eyes. In the midst of it was a bright red object, like a human head in size, but featureless—a round dome of rough red hide resembling the snout of a shark.

The thing drifted across the pool till it touched the lip of rock where Bill crouched, fascinated. He leaped backward, with his shin cut.

Too late to dodge entirely, he had seen brown fingers grip the rock for purchase, a brown hand and arm wielding a cleaver slash at his legs. Yet the certainty that the mask of red sharkskin and seaweed concealed a native dispelled the superstitious horror that had paralyzed him and caused him to drop his knife as he dodged.

Feet first, Bill jumped for the featureless red head. His feet, falling upon the "devil's" shoulders, drove the thing beneath the water. Bill twisted and lunged blindly. His hand closed on a human neck.

Instantly he caught the throat in the crook of his arm, ripped the mask aside, and dug his fingers into the windpipe. He had fallen behind his enemy; had had time to fill his lungs with air after the long dive, while the other had not.

He expected to choke the "devil" into submission—but never had Bill struggled hand to hand with a man so powerful.

THE native lashed right and left with the cleaver. Bill felt the movements, and drew his legs out of the way. The other could not strike at his arms, wrapped as they were around head and throat. The native knew that. Like a flash his tactics changed. The naked body writhed in Bellow Bill's grip. Fingers tore at his, loosening his grip, but failing to dislodge it.

A leg found his own, and wrapped around it. Both unable to swim, they sank slowly, writhing and twisting downward. The native was holding Bill fast, confident that the white man's lungs would be the first to fail.

Beneath the water neither could strike a crimping blow with heel or fist. They wrestled, the native to hold, Bill to punish. Equaled in strength, the pearler had the greater skill. He caught an arm in a hammer lock, bent it backward and snapped the bone.

The agony made the native faint. His struggles ceased, and Bill bore him upward and pulled him out on the floor of the cave.

For several minutes Bill panted heavily, and before he had completely recovered the native opened his eyes. He was a Marquesan, to judge from his tattooing, of middle age, and heavily muscled, with a fierce and brooding countenance that bespoke little intelligence, but vast courage and determination. Yet as he caught Bill's eye he cringed on the black stone floor, as an ox, had it the intelligence, might cringe before a butcher.

"What name belong you?" Bill demanded.

Except that the native's fear and pain became more intense, he gave no answer.

"You bad fella," Bill charged. "*Kai-kai* marster belong you."

In the brown face of the native anger—or was it devotion?—conquered fear.

"No bad fella. No *kai-kai* marster belong me," he protested in a voice nearly as deep as Bellow Bill's. "Good marster, belong me, die. You savvy One Eye Kell'gan. Him bad fella! Try steal pearls belong marster. Marster say, 'Teli, you keep pearls belong me. Bad fella Kell'gan try *kai-kai* you.'"

Bellow Bill laid aside the diver's knife he had picked up, and removed his singlet. With the cloth he made a sling for the broken arm, then wrapped a bandage around his own leg.

"All right. You good fella," he said. "Tell the yarn in your own way, but be quick about it."

In the limited vocabulary of *bêche-de-mer* English, with its endless circumlocutions, the native complied. His name was Teli. He had come to the island with the professor as diver and servant. The professor had been a good master, very gentle, very wise. At first Teli had thought him crazy, but when the pearls began to grow, he had decided that Montross was a great magician, or a god, and served him in awe as well as affection.

But as the pearls grew, the too observant One Eye Kerrigan, who brought them their supplies twice a year, and who was a "bad fella too much," had begun to make open threats, and the old professor, weakened by constant wading in water to examine his oysters, had fallen sick.

"Face belong him burn; blood belong him capsize," Teli explained, coughing and spitting in crude pantomime.

"Consumption," Bellow Bill thought to himself.

As soon as Kerrigan had sailed on his next-to-last visit, more than nine moons ago, the professor had Teli dump all the pearl-bearing oysters in front of the cave, which the diver had discovered while exploring the island.

Teli had wanted to put the oysters inside the cave, too, but no. Light and movement of water were necessary to the growth of the pearls. Instead, the professor had made a p u m p, and boiled great pots of herbs until he had produced a barrel of thick black ink. These Teli had brought into the cave.

The native pointed into the darkness, and Bill, rising to investigate, found a crude wooden pump with a ten-foot handle by which fully five gallons of ink could be shot through a pipe that curved down into the water. The p r o f e s s o r had also made the strange headdress and armed Teli with the cleaver.

"Marster say, 'Kill fella belong schooner,'" Teli explained excitedly. "'Them bad fella. They kill you, kill me—'"

Bill nodded. The professor had been feverish, dying, probably a little out of his head when those instructions had been given. Also, he had been right. Any defense less terrible would have failed to drive Kerrigan off.

After Kerrigan left, Teli explained, he had been told to wait—until men with brass buttons came in a police boat. On no account was he to attack the men with brass buttons, but only schooner men. To the police he was to explain everything, as he was explaining it to Bill.

"Why, the scientific son of a sea-cook!" Bill exclaimed in admiration. Of course, the professor could not be sure that any letter intrusted to Kerrigan would be mailed. On the other hand, how could he summon help, when Kerrigan's schooner afforded his only means of communication? Trouble at the island would be certain to bring the police sooner or later—would have brought them instantly if Kerrigan had not been dying when he returned to Fakarava. They had had no opportunity to cross-examine either Kerrigan or Bill. Events had moved too quickly.

"The old boy sure guessed right!" Bill muttered.

"Why, even when the police came there'd be so many of them that he wouldn't have been double crossed—as he might have been if he had had Teli make a dugout and go off with a letter."

The pearler leaned forward.

"What name papers belong marster?" he demanded sternly. "You keep papers along you?"

Teli looked uncomfortable. Yes, there had been papers, he admitted, but whereas all men knew the value of pearls, papers were of little account. Not until he had erected the headstone for his master, and the master lay dying, had he been given a packet so large—he measured it with his hands—wrapped and sealed with wax.

He had had to bury the master, and make sacrifices at the grave, keep a lookout for schooners lest he be caught napping. He had hidden the papers in the thatch of the house, since he feared water would spoil them in the cave. One Eye Kerrigan, in fury after the death of his divers, had set the house afire—

"You come schooner along me," interrupted Bill grimly, and dived first into the pool. He had been gone so long Montross would think him dead.

An hour later he sat in his cabin facing Montross across a table in the center of which was a double handful of pearls, none smaller than half an inch in diameter. After his return Kory and Mapiao had made short work of lifting the shell.

"THE largest, finest pearls the world will ever see," he boomed. "Don't look so glum because your father's papers were burned, Montross! He's made you a rich man, and— Hell! I'm a roughneck, but I'm glad we don't know what bug gets into an oyster and starts pearls growing. If those papers hadn't been destroyed, the secret would get out, and every money-hungry beach comber in the South Seas would have a pearl farm! Real pearls would have been on sale pretty soon at the five and ten all over the world.

"There's no denying your father found the secret of the pearl. These gems here will prove that! But the world's better off with a few things in it that can't be manufactured cheap. A pearl ought to stand for danger and skill—the risk the diver takes, and the years the jeweler spends in matching up a string—"

"Half of these are yours, of cou'se," said Montross.

"Sell them for me and put the jack to my credit in the First National of 'Frisco," Bill said heartily. "I don't hate money. I just dislike the guys that insist on seeing their profit in advance."

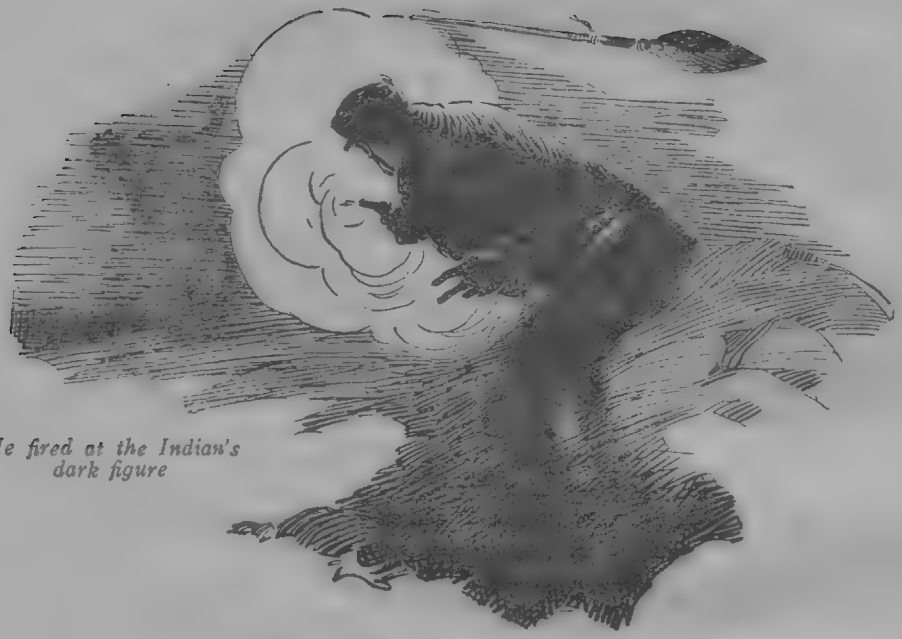
Bill threw back his coppery gold head triumphantly.

"I did just what One Eye Kerrigan figured I'd do—and won out!" he exulted. "What's the fun of having money, compared to beating out a double crossin' scoundrel by playing fair? A dying old man won the loyalty of a native and was smart enough to imitate the discharge of a cuttlefish, and everybody but you and me was sure it was a devil!"

A blow of Bill's tattooed fist made the pearls bounce.

"I'm sort of glad those papers burned, because I want to keep on in the pearling game forever! It—leads to things!"

THE END.



He fired at the Indian's dark figure

Gone North

With every man's hand against him, Jim Fallon drives his canoe boldly into the perilous waters of the Hudson Bay country on a quest that may mean death

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Man-Hunt," "The Raider," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIM FALLON, adventurer of the West and the Yukon, is interested in the mystery of Lin Underhill's disappearance in the Hudson Bay country, where he had gone to inspect some timberland for his father. On his way to the trading post of Ross Island, Fallon is quizzed by a red-haired woman, Blanche Devake; and then he is set upon by her companions, Kelso and the giant Blandin. He proves his superiority by whipping them both. Underhill is supposed to know of the whereabouts of a rich gold strike far off in the wilderness.

He starts out from Ross Island with the Indian guide, Jackwoon, who had reported that Underhill had strayed from camp and disappeared. Jackwoon tries to let Fallon get wrecked in deadly rapids, but the woodsman gets through, and then frightens the Indian into a partial confession—that Underhill had been kidnaped by Blandin and others, and taken north. So Fallon starts on again, with Blandin and

This story began in the Argosy for March 22.

Kelso behind him, and a treacherous guide leading the way.

CHAPTER VII.

AMBUSH.

SINCE Fallon had discovered that Lin Underhill was alive and had been taken north, he told Jackwoon to head straight down the Hayes until he reached a point directly north of where Lin had been captured.

Late in the afternoon they entered a section of river where there were several islands. The mainland was featured by low, rolling, timber-clad hills which swept down to the water and were fringed by a rank growth of marsh weeds, huge granite rocks and willows.

The islands were comparatively bare except for evergreen clumps here and there. Fallon selected one of them for a camp, drove his canoe upon a sloping beach and called to Jackwoon.

Dusk had come by the time Jackwoon had prepared supper. They ate in silence, and then Fallon got up, stepped to the river with the frying pan in hand, filled the pan with water, and carefully drowned the fire. Jackwoon said nothing, but watched interestedly.

Fallon sat on a rock and smoked. It was dark now, and Fallon went behind a huge bowlder to light his pipe; he was careful to cup the blaze of the match with his hand. Over the bowl of the pipe he observed Jackwoon watching him. A fleeting glance, then Jackwoon looked down again.

Later, a match blazed in Jackwoon's hand and was applied to his pipe. The match flared brightly, revealing the Indian's flat features and his black, gleaming eyes. The eyes were defiant.

Fallon laughed—and threw himself backward behind the bowlder where he had lighted his pipe, at just the instant that a rifle bullet, fired from the south bank of the river, struck the rock, glanced off and went whining into the trees on the north shore.

At the noon halt Fallon had buckled on a cartridge belt, a holster and a huge Colt revolver which he took from his pack. Jackwoon had watched this ominous proceeding, and he should have taken heed of the threat it portended.

He had no time to regret his action in lighting the match so that its blaze would reveal Fallon to his friends on the south shore. For as Fallon threw himself backward, the big gun at his hip crashed heavily.

Jackwoon, throwing himself sidewise, received the bullet in his right arm, near the shoulder. He pitched forward to the rocks, screaming curses, as Fallon's gun roared again, and a naked Indian, looming out of the darkness behind Jackwoon, plunged forward and landed heavily beside him.

The rifle on the south shore was silent now, but as Fallon rose to his feet he heard a crunching of the pebbles on the beach behind him; saw a dark figure silhouetted against the star haze.

He bent his body from the hips and heard a caribou spear hiss over him and shiver itself against the huge bowlder behind him. His Colt roared again and the dark figure vanished. A knife clattered on the rocks near the shore; there was a splash in the water that sent a fine spray upward. The spray dissolved, the darkness held no more figures; silence again reigned.

FOR a time Fallon did not move. Jackwoon, the treacherous, did not again raise his voice. Fallon crept forward on his hands and knees

and found the knife that had been dropped by the Indian who had fallen into the water, ran an investigating hand over the weapon, and slipped it into his belt. From its feel he identified it as a long, ivory-handled *kiliutok* knife. It was wet, and he knew the Indian owner had swum to the island with his confederate who had died behind Jackwoon.

There had been three of the Indians. Away back at the edge of the smooth water near the rapids, Fallon had seen them, portaging their canoes through the timber. That was why, at the smooth water, he had forgiven Jackwoon so quickly.

Twice during the day he had seen them again, as they lurked behind on the river; and several times in the dark green foliage of the trees far back from the river's edge he had caught the reflection of the sun gleaming on their paddles. The mirror-like flashes were unmistakable, and he had been able to determine with some accuracy how far they were behind him.

Just at dusk, far up the river, he had seen some tall rushes waving. Twice they had been agitated, and he knew the three Indians had two canoes.

When he had poured water on the fire he had observed Jackwoon's lips droop disappointedly; and when he had mutely communicated to Jackwoon his knowledge of the presence of the Indians on the south shore—by lighting his pipe in the shelter of the huge bowlder — Jackwoon had defiantly lighted his own in the open, thus exposing Fallon to the fire of the waiting enemy.

In the faint star haze Fallon could see Jackwoon and the first Indian he had killed. The savage, naked except for a breechcloth, was lying face down on a slab of rock, the starlight gleaming on his greased body. Jackwoon was sitting, bent forward, his left hand gripping his right arm. He tried to stifle a groan, but did not succeed.

"Hurts, eh?" said Fallon unconcernedly. "Well, you were lucky, Jack. My elbow struck a rock when I pulled on you, or you'd have been with your friend there."

He now told Jackwoon to light another match and to motion, while the match blazed, to the remaining Indian on the south shore. Then Jackwoon was to sit down again.

Jackwoon obeyed. Apparently there was no instinct or impulse of loyalty in him. He sat down again after lighting the match, and waited.

He had not long to wait. Listening, both men could hear the water rippling as the prow of a canoe cleaved it. They could hear the keel of the light craft grate slightly upon the sloping shore.

Jackwoon did not look, but he heard a light step behind him, and he shivered and cringed when Fallon's heavy revolver belched a crimson lance that passed above him. He heard the Indian groan as he fell, and after that there came no sounds except the gentle lapping of the water against the shore and the voices of the denizens of the timber.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET CHANNEL.

THE killing of the third Indian was necessary and Fallon felt no remorse for the deed. He had meant to kill Jackwoon, too; he had told the Indian the truth about his elbow striking a rock at the instant he had pressed the trigger. For Jackwoon had been disloyal and treacherous.

Twice had Fallon obeyed an impulse of mercy when for his own safety he should have killed a would-be murderer: once when Blandin and Kelso had attacked him on the steamer and again when Jackwoon had tried to shoot him when his back was turned.

In Fallon was now stirring the primitive passion of self-preservation; and, augmented by this latest attack upon him by his enemies, Blandin and Kelso, there grew the cold determination to fight these men by the methods they themselves had introduced; a cold calm that masked turbulent passions.

He did not sleep. He sat there, facing Jackwoon through the short night. When the first gray streaks lighted the eastern sky he got up, and scouted around the edge of the island.

He unloaded Jackwoon's canoe, laid the pack on the ground, opened it and removed everything that belonged to the Indian. To these he added grub enough to last for two or three days.

Then he added the remainder of the Indian's pack to his own effects, distributing the load in the canoe so that it would ride evenly when his own weight was in it; stepped on the shore again and looked at his sullen-eyed guide.

"You're through, Jack," he said. "No good. You stay here. In one, two days, maybe, Blandin and Kelso will come. The grub I'm leaving will last you until then."

Jackwoon did not answer. He sat, staring at the ground.

Fallon took up a bowlder that must have weighed at least a hundred pounds, carried it to where the Indian's canoe was drawn up on the shore, laid the bowlder down, and shoved the canoe into the water. Picking up the bowlder again, he dropped it into the center of the craft, smashing its keel and knocking a great hole in its side. He treated the other likewise.

He pushed his own canoe into the water, and paddled downstream, to disappear from Jackwoon's view. Presently he reappeared, heading across the river to the south shore.

In some rushes he found the second canoe belonging to the Indians. After wrecking it he shot his own craft out into the current and vanished among the islands downstream.

He apprehended no further immediate danger from Blandin's hirelings. He had no doubt that Blandin and Kelso were several days behind him, and that they would travel slower than he, with three in the party—if they brought Blanche Devake with them.

ALTHOUGH his canoe was now laden with almost all the luggage it still did not carry more than an ordinary load, and skimmed the water lightly under the impetus of his powerful strokes.

Jackwoon, loyal or neutral, would have been a help to him but disloyal he was a burden and a menace. Without a guide his difficulties would be multiplied; he was a stranger to the country. But he was wise with years spent in wilderness sections as vast and as desolate as this.

He shot swiftly through a gorge between towering rock walls into a broad stretch of smooth water several hundred yards wide and seemingly two or three miles long.

The sun was high now, and it shone straight down the river eastward into Fallon's eyes. He drove the canoe toward the north shore, into the shadows. The water was deep and his canoe sped swiftly along the glassy surface.

He blinked his eyes rapidly and held

his paddle poised, permitting the canoe to glide along unguided while he stared, amazed and incredulous, almost convinced that what he saw was a thought-picture, a day-dream.

Not more than two hundred yards ahead of him, straight down the stream and shooting rapidly shoreward, was a canoe with a woman in it. She had seen him apparently for she was bending forward, plying the paddle furiously, evidently seeking cover before he should see her. And while he watched, her canoe slipped past a rocky point and vanished.

His glance at the woman had been brief, and she was too far away for him to be able to distinguish her features, but she wore a checkered mackinaw, a white stocking cap, and when for an instant the sunlight had shone on her hair he had caught a glint of gold in it.

The woman was Blanche Devake, of course, he decided. But how could she have reached this place so soon? Naturally, if the Devake woman was here, Blandin and Kelso were also in the vicinity. Was there another waterway through the wilderness, or were they familiar with some trail which had brought them across country?

FALLON'S hesitation lasted only a few minutes. He was aware of the danger of ambush. However, they would not need to prepare such a trap, for if they had been informed that he was coming straight down the river they had only to conceal themselves and shoot him as he passed. Besides, the woman's fright at sight of him had seemed to be real. She had been so startled that she had rocked the canoe, and with her first stroke had almost dropped the paddle, and she had subsequently displayed every evidence of terror. The canoe had swayed from side to side under the impetus of her splashing and hurried strokes.

Fallon had decided. He drove his canoe to the point of rocks, deftly turned it shoreward and permitted it to glide into a little bay formed by the rocky point and the mainland. His heavy revolver was in his right hand.

He was a fair target for an enemy on shore, and still nothing happened. The smooth water of the little bay was still slightly ruffled by the passing of the woman's canoe, but the craft and its occupant were not in sight.

The mainland was fringed by a dense growth of various varieties of cedar, pine, spruce, fir and willows so wild and thick that a man would have trouble trying to penetrate it. Fallon's gaze searched the marsh reeds along the shore, the rocks of the point around which he had come. He could see no place where a canoe had landed.

He paddled slowly toward the deeper recesses of the bay. In the center of the bay there was deep water, and it continued deep clear to the end of the bay. This unusual condition was explained when he observed that the bottom was composed of huge blocks of rock which had probably been tossed there centuries ago during some gigantic upheaval of the earth. There had been no delta-building stream here.

He had allowed the canoe to drift until its bow was against the base of a huge rock that formed the end of the bay, and he was again scrutinizing the shore line in an attempt to discover where the canoe had been drawn out when he noticed that the bow of his own craft was no longer against the base of the huge rock. It was slowly but surely drifting toward the mouth of the bay.

He paddled close to the rock, watch-

ing the current, and when the bow of the canoe struck a curtain of willows he was about to back-paddle when he caught a glimpse of water beyond them.

A stroke forward and he was through the willows. There was a triumphant grin on his face as he forced the canoe through still another curtain of willows and found himself on a smooth, dark stream at the bottom of a gorge.

The gorge was possibly twenty feet wide. Granite walls, straight and tall, rose above him. A hundred feet or so ahead was an abrupt bend; the gorge ran straight north, till at a distance of perhaps half a mile the huge rock formation ended and the stream ran through an open section of country much like that through which he had been traveling for many days. And far away, perhaps a mile, he saw the canoe for which he had been searching. It was in a patch of sunlight, and the paddle was flashing rapidly.

It wasn't a trap; that was certain. For Blanche Devake was doing her best to escape him. He was puzzled now, but was determined to overtake her.

HIS canoe was leaping through the lazy current. He expected that somewhere along the gorge stream, the woman would meet Blandin and Kelso. Sooner or later they would strike again, and he would rather meet them now, in the daylight, than have them dogging him through the wilderness, to creep upon him while he slept.

He gained upon the woman. Once, after he had paddled about a mile, he saw her pull her canoe from the stream and begin a portage. She was amazingly rapid in her movements, and she handled the canoe easily. He knew that he would have to work hard to overtake her.

When he reached the portage he drew the canoe up, tossed out the two packs—retaining nothing but his rifle, which he held in his right hand while carrying the canoe over the portage—and was soon sending the lightened craft forward with amazing speed.

He gained steadily, for his paddle dipped more frequently than the woman's, and his strokes were more powerful. The woman seemed to be tiring rapidly. She plied her paddle more slowly, at times splashing as though too weary to direct her strokes.

She presently reached a point where the water grew shallow, where great jagged rocks were strewn so thickly in the bed of the stream that a canoe could not be forced between them. She grounded the canoe.

To Fallon's amazement she did not attempt to make the portage, but leaped from the canoe and started to run into a level which stretched from a huge mound of rocks on the shore.

Fallon's canoe was beached almost as quickly as hers, for he had been only a hundred feet or so behind. He drove it high on the land, leaped out and ran with mighty strides around the mound of rocks behind which she had vanished.

As he reached the mound of rocks and had a clear view of what was beyond them, he halted abruptly.

Seated upon a small stone about a dozen yards from where he had stopped was the woman. Her face was flushed, her bosom was heaving rapidly. She had evidently pulled her stocking cap off, for it was lying on the ground at her feet, and her hair, long and abundant, had cascaded to her shoulders. It gleamed and glinted in

the strong sunlight like strands of finely spun gold.

Beyond her, perhaps a hundred yards, was a bend in the stream where the portage ended. Beached on the sloping shore were half a dozen canoes. Half a dozen Indians, bearing caribou spears and belt-axes, were running toward the woman, gibbering excitedly.

Fallon stood, filled with sudden self-derision.

He had blundered, and was in for a fight. He was aware of an obscure embarrassment because of the mistake he had made, but he drew his feet together and glanced along the sights of the rifle he still carried.

The woman was not Blanche Devake.

She was younger. A girl. Certainly not more than twenty years old. And the savages who were running toward her were her friends. It was apparent that they had seen her as she came around the mound of rocks, breathless and terrorized, and that they were charging, intent upon protecting and avenging her.

CHAPTER IX.

GAIL HAMMOND.

FALLON'S rifle was rigid and his cheek was against the stock. He took aim at the chest of a giant Indian who had swiftly drawn ahead of the others in the run from the canoes to the woman. He followed the movements of the savage—yet he did not fire. There would still be time when the spearmen passed the woman, who was the object of their concern.

At the distance of a dozen yards he would be in danger of their spears, which he knew they hurled with a side motion that produced incredible speed; and yet he held his fire, hoping the woman would act to prevent the threatened clash.

There was wisdom in Fallon's decision. Even before the first savage reached her she was on her feet, facing the spearmen, holding up one hand commandingly and speaking to them sharply, in a language that Fallon did not understand.

He was amazed at the effect of her words. Some of the Indians halted so quickly that they went to their knees; while the largest of them—the one whose broad chest had been covered by Fallon's gun—threw himself backward and went down in a heap. His spear fell from his hand and he sat motionless, glaring.

She was a tall girl, taller than Blanche Devake. Her figure had a fullness which suggested curves without emphasizing them; it indicated strength, and grace of movement. Her shoulders were broad but not masculine. This woman—this girl—was a personage.

She stood, coldly watching Fallon, with a commanding, authoritative, challenging gleam which would have embarrassed many men in Fallon's position.

Not Fallon. His gaze was never more steady than now, as he lowered his rifle and doffed his cap; and his admiration could not be concealed. This sturdy, graceful and regal young woman had stirred in him an emotion that he had never yet experienced.

It was not love at first sight. It was not desire. It was merely a strong man's admiration for one of nature's masterpieces.

She was beautiful, and the skin of her face and neck was satiny and flawless with the dusky peachbloom tint of perfect health. Yet it was not

her visible charms that stirred him. It was something deeper and more substantial than these. It was the spirit he glimpsed—the sturdy, courageous heart of her. It shone from her eyes; he felt it in the poise of her lithe young body, in the set of her head. She was the spirit of the wilderness. Her beauty was the beauty of the animals that roam the forest trails.

But he was moved to silent mirth when, with a movement which was as unconscious as it was feminine, she reached up and brushed aside the mass of hair which the gusty wind had blown over her face. With several deft motions she caught it up, twisted it into various glistening ropes and coils, and tucked it in.

FALLON smiled. And Fallon's smile could be very tantalizing. It must have annoyed the girl, for she drew herself up haughtily and her eyes flashed angrily.

"You are amused," she said. Her voice concealed a taunt, and yet he knew that she was perplexed and curious. "Are you amused at my spearmen? Had I not halted them, you would not now be standing there, mocking."

"Not mocking you," returned Fallon with a gentleness that had always been his way with women. "Merely admiring you. I have looked upon many women, and perhaps not one has been as fair as you. And yet all have had the same feminine habit of tucking in the stray wisps of hair. That is what brought the smile, and nothing else."

"And why were you trying to catch me?"

"I am sorry for that. I thought you were another. When I last saw her, she wore garments very like yours."

"Her name?"

"Blanche Devake."

"Is she your friend?"

The girl's eyes were now gleaming with disdain. She was primitive and had not learned to conceal her passions, and so Fallon knew the Devake woman was known and hated.

"I may safely name her among my enemies," said Fallon.

The girl gazed straight at him. He was conscious that he was being probed and judged.

"What is your name, and what are you doing in this country?" she asked.

He told her.

She caught her breath sharply, and trembled. As Fallon watched her he saw a scarlet tide steal up her throat and spread to her cheeks and forehead. Her eyes closed and she swayed. Then the color receded. She stood now, gazing at Fallon fiercely, her lithe young body rigid.

"How am I to know that you are telling the truth?"

"How do I know that you are not one of Lin's enemies?" smiled Fallon. "Lin is alive. He was in this valley, and you have talked with him. Perhaps you know where he is, and are holding him for Blandin and the others."

"You know better than that, Fallon," she answered, straightening proudly. "A moment ago I betrayed myself. I knew that you had read my secret. Lin Underhill was here, in this valley. He was hurt. I brought him back to health. I love him. I hate Blandin and Kelso and the Devake woman, and if I had thought that you were leagued with them against Lin my spearmen would have killed you before now.

"You are a man, Fallon. You are strong, shrewd, brave. I saw that when you came around the corner of

the rocks and saw my spearmen. You were surprised, but no panic overtook you; you even smiled as you laid your cheek against your rifle and aimed at Wattanooka's chest. You do not look at me as Blandin looked at me. And yet you may be Blandin's friend."

IN a pocket of Fallon's shirt were the photograph of Lin Underhill and the note Lin had written to the guide, Jackwoon, on the day of his supposed death. These Fallon gave the girl.

After gazing long at the picture she suddenly hugged it to her breast.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "it is Lin. And that is how Lin writes." Suddenly she grew cold again, and suspicious. "But why are you in this country without a guide? A stranger would get lost."

He told of his experiences since landing at Rossville.

"Yes," she finally said, nodding; "it is true. For early this morning from behind a clump of willows far up the river I saw you hurl a heavy rock through the bottom of a canoe. I saw Jackwoon sitting on a rock holding his wounded arm. And then I fled downstream. I paddled swiftly and was far ahead of you. But I lingered too long on the river and you saw me. Jackwoon has sold himself to Blandin and I did not think he could be your guide. But now I believe you. You must go with me to Mercie Valley. It is my home, and my mother's home. There I shall tell you how I came to know Lin Underhill, and Blandin and Kelso, and some others And after I have told you these things, you will still go on, because of me—because I want you to find Lin and bring him back to me."

"Yes," answered Fallon, "I shall go. But first I shall return to the last portage for my packs."

The girl quickly turned, clapped her hands and spoke to the squatting Indians. Instantly obeying her, they leaped to their feet, ran to the beach where their canoes lay, seized three of them, returned, trotting, to the open water above, launched their craft and sped away.

Fallon watched them for an instant. Then he turned to the girl.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Gail Hammond."

"Your Indians love you, Gail," said Fallon.

"Yes," she answered, simply. "When they saw you standing there aiming your rifle at them they knew you could kill them all. And yet they would have willingly died, if I had said the word. Did you observe Wattanooka?"

"The biggest?"

Gail nodded.

"He is as big as you, Fallon. Perhaps he is as strong. He is proud of his strength. If you should do anything to hurt me—you or any other man—Wattanooka would never quit your trail until he had killed you. Twice he has begged me to let him search for Lin. He hates Blandin."

"Why don't you let him search for Lin?"

"He shall, now," said Gail. "He shall go with you."

CHAPTER X.

MURDER IN THE WOODS.

FALLON'S canoe was portaged, his packs placed in it by the Indians, and, paddling steadily, he followed in the wake of the other canoes, northward. Gail Hammond, alone, was

in the first canoe, followed by Wattanooka.

Shortly before the short twilight came on they were in camp for the night. Fallon estimated they had traveled at least twenty miles. The character of the country had changed very little. There were some vast, barren stretches, rolling and rocky; some low-growing timber; swamps; thickets of willow; some poplars. On various sloping ridges and swells was reindeer moss; here and there was a stretch of vivid color where the scarlet poppies reared their heads; and occasionally appeared the red *baknecsh;* and between the rocks on the ridges the white snow-flowers.

Flung against the skyline on all sides was the high rock wall that shut the valley from the outside world, a ragged, desolate rim grimly guarding this sunken garden spot.

Fallon rigged his canvas shelter against the north wind, built a small fire to keep the winged pests away, lit his pipe and smoked, watching his fire. Darkness grew upon them, although the white light of the north still glowed upon the horizon. He heard no step, no sound. Yet he sensed a presence and turned his head to see Gail kneeling at the end of his shelter.

In the glow of the firelight her face was calm and serious. Unsmilingly, she said:

"I'm coming in; I want to talk."

In this visit was no stealth, no embarrassment, no blushing to reveal consciousness of sex; no apologetic smiling. In her manner was only naturalness and dignity which needed no words to manifest it. She got into the shelter with him, crossed her hands over her knees, and sighed deeply.

"I've been bothered, thinking about Lin," she said, then frankly studied his face for some minutes before she again spoke.

"Tell me why Lin's father chose you to search for him."

Fallon told her that he had never inquired about that. He had got a telegram from the elder Underhill which had opened negotiations. He had come because he had wanted to come and because he had had nothing else to do at the time.

"Some one had told him about you? To be talked about that way, you must have done something to make people talk."

"Oh, people will talk."

"Yes; if you do something bad. And they won't talk about you if you are only just ordinarily good. But if you have done something very good they will talk about you. What had you done to make them talk about you?"

"Nothing. I had just lived like other people."

She shook her head at the fire.

"You've done things, but you are too modest to talk about them," she said. "But of course you couldn't be boastful and brave at the same time. You are a brave man, and you would like Lin if you should meet him. For Lin is a brave man, too."

She sat silent, gazing at the fire. Her firm young face had lines in it now as she strove with her thoughts and her problems. The stars came out, glittering like gems in the dusky velvet blue of the sky, and the solemn shadows of the forest grew darker and more mysterious. And then, without preface or further delay, she told the story of Lin Underhill's visit to the valley.

"There will be no sense in what I am going to tell you unless I begin at the beginning," she said.

And this is how, afterward, Fallon remembered it:

ADAM HAMMOND—Gail's father—and a man named Lumly Randall, had come into the Hudson Bay country twenty-five years ago. They had taken ship from Quebec and had disembarked at Churchill, where they had outfitted for a trip inland. Lumly Randall was a rich man. He had told Adam Hammond that his trip to the Hudson Bay country was to be for the purpose of entering the fur trade in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company. That enterprise might be hazardous, but Randall intimated that he would have plenty of influential men behind him if it came to a fight with the established company.

Randall built himself a house in the wilderness north of the Fox River. It was an enormous structure of stones that were to be picked up all over the face of the country. There were twenty rooms, secret tunnels and passages, a tower. The doors were constructed of stout timbers swung on heavy iron hinges and firmly barred; the windows were shuttered with heavy planks.

In the stuff that Randall had brought with him—half a ship's cargo, Adam Hammond had said—were two small cannon, some fowling pieces, two dozen rifles of heavy caliber; some great, long pistols and several of more modern pattern; cutlasses, swords, pikes, and axes. A barrel of gunpowder had been freighted up the river along with the arms.

Adam Hammond had made some remark about these warlike implements, but Randall, a great hulking man of thirty at that time, with one eye—the left—missing, had laughed and kept his silence.

The great house was built, and occupied by Randall. Later, when Randall took a squaw to live with him—a Cree woman whom he bought from the chief of a nomadic tribe—Hammond left him. Indeed, by this time Hammond began to suspect that Randall was something more than a rich man; he began to believe that Randall was a man with a price upon his head. He had made a fortress of the stone house, and his conduct while in it was not that of a man who had been reared a gentleman.

There were riotous doings there; much drinking and gambling, and the gamblers and drinkers were not the hunters and trappers of the section, nor were they men from the factor's house at Churchill. They were men who drifted in from the outside, from Churchill mostly, and judging from their talk and actions they were seafaring men who had known Randall in his earlier days.

Once a woman and a child appeared there. The woman was delicate and thin, emaciated as if by some wasting disease, with dark hollows under her eyes. The child was a girl about two or three years of age—a pretty thing with dark hair and eyes and a disconcerting habit of staring at one.

Hammond had not told Gail what had happened in the big house; he had related no details. But in the main she had gathered that what went on there was wicked enough. And as Hammond had no liking for those things, and as Randall showed no disposition to set about the work of founding a trading post, Hammond left him. Randall laughed at him, but let him go because there had been no definite agreement between them.

Randall had grown disgustingly vulgar and bestial, and it was with great relief that Hammond went his sepa-

rate way. He went westward into the wilderness, built himself a cabin, and devoted his time to trapping. He prospered at this and sold his furs to the factor at Churchill. Later he met a girl at the trading post, and in the course of time the girl became Hammond's wife, and Gail's mother.

HAMMOND kept working his way westward. While running his trap lines he prospected a little, and at last on one of his trips into the western wilderness he found this valley. It was a paradise. Hammond had accidentally found a secret entrance to it. He built another cabin and settled his wife, now a mother, in it.

He had found the valley inhabited by a tribe of Indians, with whom he had made friends. The Indians were Chippewas who had sought independence from a chief who was offensive to them. They had found the valley, and for several years they had lived in it without the knowledge of the remainder of the tribe. Most of the Indians living in the valley had known Hammond's wife while she had served the factor at Churchill. They liked and trusted her, and they liked and trusted Adam Hammond. In time they began to look upon him as their leader, and they renounced their tribal rituals and adopted Hammond's God.

They had lived peaceably for several years. And then Hammond, prospecting in the valley, had found gold—free gold in staggering quantity.

Hammond had taken some of the gold to Churchill to have it assayed, and somehow the news got to Randall. Randall swore that he would have half of the golden treasure because it was he who had brought Adam Hammond to the country, and furthermore between them was a written agreement to the effect that he and Hammond were to share together in all things that they might find.

But Randall was not able to find Hammond. Word of Randall's ragings had reached Hammond. And so he took no more gold to Churchill or anywhere else. He left it where he had found it, in the valley. And there it had remained until this day.

But Hammond had made one mistake. He had not told his wife or daughter where he had found the gold, and he had left with them no diagram or map of the section in which he had found it. He had kept the secret to himself.

And then one day he had set out for Rossville to get some supplies. Wattanooka had gone with him. They had been absent several days, when one morning Wattanooka returned, alone. He was paddling his canoe with one arm—the other was broken, the hand smashed. There were wounds all over his body, and a great gash on the top of his head where he had evidently been struck with some heavy weapon.

In the bottom of the canoe was a strange white man who later identified himself as Linton Underhill. Underhill was unconscious and used up about as badly as Wattanooka. Adam Hammond had been killed.

LATER, Wattanooka told the story. He had reached a place called "Big Tree" portage on the way to Rossville. Wattanooka was carrying the canoe and Hammond was behind him, with a light pack. In a spot where there was some dense undergrowth he heard Hammond call out sharply. He dropped the canoe and turned, to see Hammond struggling with half a dozen men—whites and Indians.

Wattanooka leaped forward to help Hammond, and was met by a spear-thrust from the brush. From another point he received a second spear or an arrow, and then others—he did not know how many. Then a blow on the top of the head, and he knew nothing more until he awakened to see a number of Indians and white men sitting in a circle around Hammond.

The white men were Blandin, Kelso, a big, evil-eyed stranger who was called Revella, and Lin Underhill. It was the first time that Wattanooka had seen any of the men, but while lying there motionless and conscious, he had heard all their names spoken. He had identified them, one after the other, for there were thoughts of vengeance in his heart.

Underhill and Hammond were bound. Jackwoon was there, among the Indians. The Indians were silent, while the white men talked. The white men were questioning Hammond about his gold. And Hammond would not answer.

They tortured Hammond. They placed glowing embers upon his arms and legs and sat there grinning cruelly as the coals seared Hammond's flesh. They prodded him with spears and arrows and inflicted unmentionable cruelties upon him.

But Hammond would not talk. Wattanooka had no power over his muscles. They would not respond to his will. He was forced to lie there and listen.

After a while the white men left Hammond. They went away in canoes, leaving the Indians to guard Hammond. They were gone a long time, and while they were away Hammond, who had fainted, regained consciousness and talked with Lin Underhill. Wattanooka overheard them.

Hammond asked Underhill many questions. Hammond told Underhill about his wife and daughter, about the hidden valley, how to find the entrance to it, and about the gold—where it would be found. He got Underhill to promise that he would find the valley, apprise his wife and daughter of what had happened to him, and tell them about the gold. He thought Wattanooka was dead. But Wattanooka was not dead. He could not talk or move. Only his ears had been awake, he said.

Hammond told Underhill that he had received a death wound. A spear had bitten him more deeply than had been intended. He could feel his life going.

When Hammond's captors returned Hammond was dead. There was a great deal of cursing, and in a fury his body was thrown into the brush to be devoured by wolves.

The white men released Underhill. Blandin and Revella, standing near Underhill, laughed and told him to take Jackwoon and resume his travels. It appeared to Wattanooka that Underhill and Jackwoon must have accidentally come upon Blandin and his crew just as Hammond had been attacked, or just after.

Underhill told Blandin and Revella that he would be glad to part from such company. Blandin and Revella continued to laugh at Underhill. They were near to blows, though, for Underhill's contempt was strong and his words were bitter. He called to Jackwoon, turned his back to Blandin and Revella and began to walk away.

Then Blandin and Revella shot him, in the back. Both took deliberate aim with their pistols. Underhill fell, face down. Revella walked to him, kicked him several times in the side and the face, and left him. They all

went away then, leaving Hammond and Underhill and Wattanooka for dead.

WATTANOOKA did not die, though for two or three days it seemed he would. Nor did Underhill die.

Here Wattanooka had boasted a little to Gail Hammond. His pride in himself was excusable, though, for never had she seen a man more terribly wounded.

Consider, she told Fallon: Wattanooka's body bore a dozen wounds. His left arm was broken. The hand was smashed. They found three deep spear wounds in him, together with half a dozen knife and arrow wounds. He had managed to bury Hammond, he had kept Underhill from dying; he had got Underhill into his canoe and had paddled all that distance with one good arm.

Wattanooka was a strong man. He was the strongest man in the country. His strength was acknowledged and he was proud of it.

But he had almost been retaken by the two white men, Revella and Blandin. He had traveled by night, fearing to meet the white men again, and one night while slipping down the river in his canoe he had see a camp fire on an island; had paddled his canoe gently into some willows and had heard the white men talking. They had been told by one of the Indians—who understood a little English—that Hammond had talked to Underhill about the gold; and they were going back to the scene of the tragedy in the hope of finding Underhill still alive. If he was still living it was their plan to restore him to health and make him talk.

They had not succeeded in finding Underhill then, of course, but they must have suspected that both he and Wattanooka had survived and escaped, for their bodies were not where they had been left. And finally, while Underhill was regaining his strength, word reached Gail that they had found Hammond's grave and that they knew Wattanooka and Underhill had escaped them.

And then, after Underhill recovered and became strong again, he decided to complete his work, and with Wattanooka to guide him he again set out to explore the wilderness. And one day after Wattanooka had returned to camp from a hunt he found the camp wrecked and Underhill gone. He trailed Underhill for several days.

Underhill had been captured by a large party of Indians and white men. Once he had seen Underhill, but had not been able to rescue him, for there had been too many in the party and Underhill had been too well guarded. He had lurked near, however, and had seen Underhill taken to Randall's stone house. He had even approached the house several times, hoping for an opportunity to get near Underhill, but the great stone walls and the forbidding atmosphere of the place had awed him and he had returned to the valley, bearing his ill news.

"WATTANOOKA is not afraid of men," Gail concluded. "He is afraid of things he does not understand."

"How long is it since Lin disappeared?" asked Fallon.

"That was six months ago. It was in the winter. But there was a thaw, and Lin was restless. He wished to go out in the spring."

"He told you where the gold might be found?"

"Yes. I have seen the place."

She clasped her hands over her knees and gazed into the fire, which had burned low. Fallon sat, steadily puffing at his pipe.

"Do you think Lin is still alive?" asked Fallon.

"Yes. He is alive. And he has not told them where they may find the gold."

"How do you know that?"

Gail touched her breast. "Something here tells me he is still alive," she said. "And if he had told them where to find the gold they would have come here to get it," she added. "For they know about the secret entrance to the valley—the one that father found when he came here. And, too, I saw Blanche Devake and Blandin at the water entrance. They would come and search for the gold but they are afraid of my Indians and the search would take too long. While they were searching, Wattanooka and my Indians would kill them."

The darkness had grown intense and Fallon's fire had gone out. He and the girl sat for a long time, saying nothing. Then she bade him good night, and moved away in the darkness.

Almost instantly, he heard her voice, a few feet from his shelter.

"Wattanooka!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

There was amazement in her voice, and stern accusation. It was apparent to Fallon that she was indignant over finding the Indian so close to his shelter; she had not given him orders to spy upon the white man.

"Me come watch," explained Wattanooka. His voice was sullen, but respectful. "No like white man. Come see no hurt Gail."

The girl laughed, and went on, taking the Indian with her.

So Wattanooka was an enemy. Fallon only smiled as he stretched himself on his bed of pine boughs.

CHAPTER XI.

MAN TO MAN.

AT dawn the next morning Fallon emerged from his shelter, leaped into his canoe and paddled half a mile down the stream to a wide, deep spot which was an ideal place for a swim.

There had been no movement at the camp, no fires.

He laid his clothes carefully upon a bowlder near the edge, and plunged in. The water was warmer than the frosty air, and he swam a while, then floated, lying on his back.

He turned over to swim back into deeper water—and observed that he had company.

Wattanooka had driven his canoe into the pool while Fallon had been idly floating on his back. He had beached the canoe, and at the moment Fallon became aware of him he was standing on the sandy beach removing his knee-length deerskin trousers—the only garment he wore, besides his moccasins.

Wattanooka was magnificently proportioned. His muscles were long, smooth, and were laid in a rippling sheath all over his body, except at the stomach where they formed two low, flat ridges. As he stood upon the beach, naked, he looked like a figure that had been carved out of red granite by a master. For a savage, he was handsome.

He did not look at Fallon. And he seemed to know the pool, for he dived into it and disappeared, to emerge as noiselessly as a seal, with his sullen black eyes upon Fallon.

Remembering that Wattanooka had told Gail he did not like him, Fallon kept a watchful eye upon the Indian, though he pretended to ignore him, and did not cut short his swim.

When Fallon, refreshed and reinvigorated, finally swam to the sloping beach and stood erect in the shallow water, Wattanooka was no less obvious in his admiration of the white man's physique, as he followed him ashore.

For Fallon was a perfect match for the savage. Standing side by side the Indian would have been taller than Fallon, but the white man's muscles were as clearly defined, his shoulders were as broad, and his strength was quite as apparent.

Yet there was something more in Fallon—something that Wattanooka lacked. Of the two nude men who were now facing each other in this primitive environment, one carried in his heart the invincible courage and determination of a long line of conquerors; while the other, equally strong, was a son of a race whose fathers had met defeat after defeat in the long-drawn battle for possession of the frontiers.

FALLON had finally become convinced that Wattanooka's interest in him was hatred. And he was never the man to postpone an inevitable clash.

"Wattanooka," he said, "you followed me."

The Indian folded his great arms over his chest and spoke slowly.

"Gail tell white man much. White man say little. Wattanooka Gail's friend. What white man want here?"

In the Indian's eyes something besides hatred was glowing. Loyalty to his mistress was there, and determination, together with a certain wistfulness. A blending of many emotions. Interpreted by Fallon, the look meant that if Fallon's errand to the country was one of friendliness to Gail Hammond there could be no hatred between the two men, but if Fallon meant harm to the girl there must be a definite settlement now. One or the other would stay at the pool.

Fallon studied the Indian. He was reluctant to concede that Wattanooka had any right to question him. But the fine loyalty of the savage to his mistress impressed him; and he smiled.

"White man came here to help Gail Hammond find Lin Underhill," he said. "That is all. White man will talk no more to Wattanooka."

The Indian's eyes flashed. His lips curved into a smile of friendliness. His great chest swelled. He extended his right hand in the white man's greeting, and after an instant Fallon seized it, gripping it firmly.

They stood there for an instant longer, searching each other's eyes while they tightened the bond between them.

"You strong," said the Indian. "Wattanooka strongest man in country," he added.

Primitive pride such as this Fallon had met before. Pride of strength had once been strong in him, and even now Wattanooka's boast touched him.

"Wattanooka speaks loudly. If Wattanooka's muscles are as strong as his voice he is a great man."

The Indian smiled confidently, and motioned Fallon to wrestle. There was no word between them as they moved about in the shallow water, then, feinting for holds, onto the sandy beach. There, chest to chest, they stood erect, their arms locked, each seeking to force the other to take a backward step. This was Wattanooka's idea of victory.

Fallon understood. His feet sank into the sand, but they went no deeper than Wattanooka's. The great muscles of his back and thighs grew and expanded into rock-like ridges as he braced himself, and once his shoulders began to bulge backward from the strain.

Then the rock-like muscles began to writhe and squirm under the white skin. They grew knotted; they crawled into bunches around his shoulder blades, along his neck, down his thighs and at his hips. Slowly he straightened the red giant until the latter's body was almost perpendicular. Wattanooka's feet began to slide in the sand.

Fallon now resorted to science. He had tested Wattanooka's strength and found it to be great, though not as great as his own. And now, to end the contest, he turned swiftly sideways to the red man, locked one of his arms under his own, swiftly bent his own body forward and threw Wattanooka a dozen feet out into the stream, into the deep water.

WATTANOOKA landed on his back, and the water splashed high as he vanished. Fallon got one look at his face as it disappeared beneath the surface, and saw amazement and chagrin depicted there. He was prepared to see the Indian emerge in a fighting rage; but when Wattanooka's face quickly appeared it was wreathed in a smile.

There was no rage in him, but only embarrassment. His boast of strength had not been vindicated. But he offered no excuse.

"You strong," he said. "Maybe stronger than Wattanooka. Know trick that Wattanooka not know. Look!"

And now he devised another test of strength. He dragged the two canoes into the water and lashed their noses together with a rope.

Fallon had played this game, also. With the bows of the canoes locked the two contestants were to paddle until one forced the other backward to a distance far enough to determine supremacy. Skill as well as strength would be needed to determine the winner of the paddling contest.

They manipulated the canoes to the center of the stream, and poised their paddles until Wattanooka gave a signal.

Their muscles swelled and leaped, and the water of the pool churned and foamed in a fury of agitation. Around and around went the canoes, their prows creaking and groaning as they clashed together; and for a quarter of an hour they strove with no apparent advantage to either. But at last Fallon's canoe began to move backward.

Realizing his defeat, Fallon did the graceful thing. He suddenly lifted his paddle aloft in token of surrender, and raised his voice full-throatedly in a cry of admiration for Wattanooka's skill and strength.

The Indian immediately ceased paddling, and leaned forward, his somberness gone, his teeth flashing in a broad smile. And yet for a time they said nothing more, for both were weary from their mighty efforts. At last Wattanooka spoke.

"You good man," he said, panting. "You stronger than Wattanooka. I win because I know trick with paddle."

"We are even there," laughed Fallon. "For I know some wrestling tricks."

The Indian shook his head, and his black eyes gleamed again.

"You fair," he said. "You win wrestling without trick. I feel you stronger."

There was respect in the Indian's eyes as they dressed, and Wattanooka related the story of Adam Hammond's death. It was evident that Blandin and Kelso, and the other man, Revella, were fiends.

Wattanooka's eyes burned with rage as he finished the tale and sat there looking at Fallon. "You go alone to stone house?"

Fallon grinned.

"Wattanooka is like the fox," he said. "He did not come to the pool to talk big, but to show his strength so that Fallon would take him to the stone house. Well—you go."

The Indian's chest swelled with pride, but he sat motionless otherwise, evidently restraining himself. But there was now no mistaking the expression in his eyes as he looked at the white man—they were worshipful.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HIDDEN VALLEY.

AN hour after dawn the little fleet of canoes was again headed northward. Gail Hammond led the way, with the others trailing her. Fallon's canoe was directly behind Gail's with Wattanooka's close. Wherever the width of the stream permitted, the giant Indian would force his canoe alongside, to tell Fallon various things about the valley.

Wattanooka was intelligent. His knowledge of English had been imparted to him by Hammond, and then by Gail. She was "White Bird" to Wattanooka and the other members of the tribe. He was the nominal chief, but the actual authority was vested in Gail since the death of her father. The Indians worshipped her.

Adam Hammond had brought some books with him into the valley, and he had sent outside for others. Between Hammond and his wife and the books Gail had acquired an education. Her quick mind, absorbing the verbal pictures of history and fiction, had built a fanciful structure of conduct and manners which answered well. But her primitive frankness was sometimes devastating.

Late that afternoon they paddled out of the stream into a small lake, a mile and a half long and perhaps half as wide. It was in the center of a gently sloping country that stretched away from it for several miles to the north and the east and the west; and where the sloping land ended were the high and massive barriers of natural rock and bald and forbidding mountain peaks that isolated the valley from the outside world.

Yet the valley was a paradise, with fields of grain in abundance despite the shortness of the growing season. And even its winters were not as severe as in the higher land that encompassed it, for the high rock barrier formed a windbreak which shunted the wild storms upward.

On the north bank of the lake, sheltered by a gigantic rock overhang that swept outward in a huge arc, for more than a hundred feet, were a number of orderly log cabins inhabited by the Indians.

At the eastern end of the lake was the large Hammond cabin, a stone chimney sticking above the center of the gable roof. There were several smaller buildings behind the cabin.

The Indians, under the direction of Wattanooka, unloaded the canoes, carried the packs to the porch of the cabin and silently vanished into their own houses. Soon Fallon was on the porch, being presented to Mrs. Hammond.

Adam Hammond's widow was a small woman, almost slight. But there was a patient steadiness in her eyes and a quiet indomitability in her manner that Fallon knew was characteristic of women of the wilderness. They were fully aware of the hazards they faced, yet they were not afraid.

And now Gail went into the house. Presently they heard her voice at a distance. Apparently she was talking with one of the Indians.

MRS. HAMMOND had motioned Fallon to a chair and sat facing him. At the sound of Gail's voice she said, slowly:

"Gail is a beautiful girl."

"I have seen none more beautiful."

"She loves Lin Underhill. He is not as tall as you," said Mrs. Hammond. "Nor as broad. Nor is there in him the romance that there is in your appearance. You have seen a great deal of life, young man; and it has not spoiled you. You are an adventurer. The wild passions are in you, but they are governed by high ideals. Yet when you want a woman you will take her. Do you want Gail?"

"I do not want Gail," answered Fallon, steadily meeting her eyes.

"Then Gail is safe. If you wanted her I should be afraid for her."

Quietly, gently, she led him to talk about himself. And she, won by Fallon's simple directness, gave to him the story of her life in this wild country.

Lumly Randall, she said, was a former pirate. With men as bloodthirsty as himself, he had roamed the southern seas. There were stories of women captured by Randall, of men forced to walk the plank, of captives borne to distant lands and sold into slavery. All these tales were true, she assured Fallon, for she had sat many nights in the store room of the factor's building at Churchill and listened to them.

The wonder of it was that Randall was not apprehended. But she had heard him boast that there were none who dared to turn him over to the law, for he knew things about men in high places that would convict them of guilt as great as his own.

And the telling of these things stirred Fallon greatly. For it seemed that beckoning to him were romance and danger and high adventure such as he had not yet encountered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE BARRIER.

ON the morning of the third day following his appearance at the Hammond home, Fallon and Wattanooka entered the evergreen forest at the rear of the cabin. Mrs. Hammond and Gail watched them go.

The Indian preceded Fallon into the evergreens, for they were going out of the valley through the secret passage that would lead them directly into the wild country in which the stone house was situated, and Wattanooka knew the trail.

There was no trail that Fallon could see, and yet Wattanooka strode ahead confidently, holding a northeasterly direction. No man could follow it unless he had threaded it before, and Wattanooka charged Fallon to mark carefully the various rock formations in case he had to return alone.

Fallon and the Indian were traveling light. The canoes had been left behind. Upon Fallon's back was a light pack containing his canvas shelter, a small store of provisions and a few cooking utensils. In his pockets were a number of cartridges for the rifle he

carried, and for the .45 Colt in the holster at his right hip. Around him was a cartridge belt studded with other cartridges.

Wattanooka likewise carried a small pack and a rifle. He carried no revolver. At his belt was a long, ivory-hafted *kiliutok* knife and behind him a fluted belt-ax. His only clothes were the deerskin trousers, and a pair of moose-hide moccasins.

They were many hours getting through the forest. But at last the trees thinned out and they began to thread a section in which great rocks and bowlders seemed to have been thrown by some mighty power.

Wattanooka slipped swiftly between and around the gigantic rocks until he found a channel that appeared to be of natural construction. At first it was only a few feet deep, but as the Indian continued to follow it the rock walls beside it grew higher, and the channel deeper, until it became a chasm with perpendicular sides. Then it angled, and they were smothered with an impenetrable darkness.

They were more than an hour in traversing the dark passageway. Wattanooka kept guiding Fallon with his voice, and Fallon kept close to him. And after a while the darkness lifted a little and a beam of light far in front of them indicated that they were approaching an outlet. When they finally stood in the open, blinking against the white light of the morning, they were through the high rock barrier which rimmed the valley, but were in a desolate, rocky section beyond which was still another barrier.

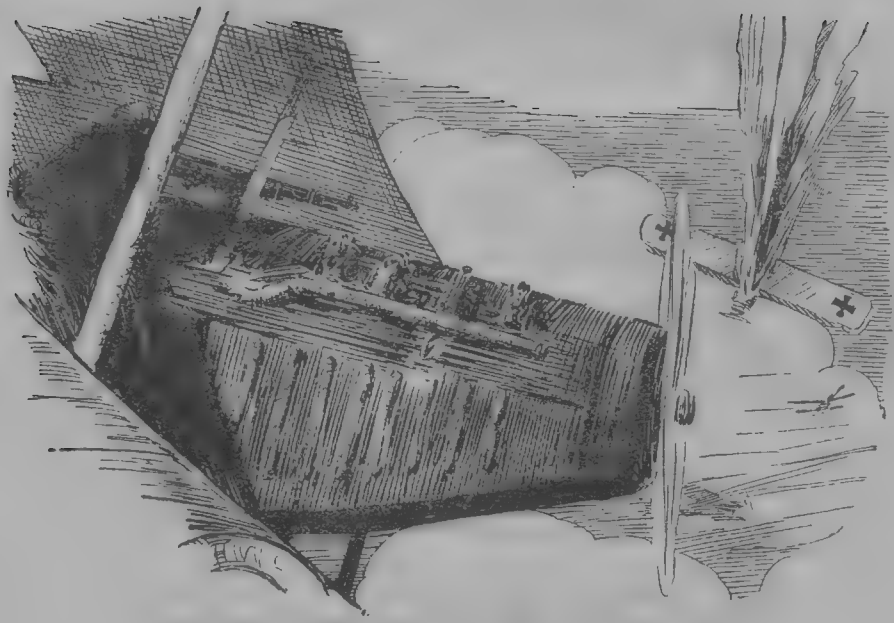
WATTANOOKA found another channel through the confusion of rocks. The second barrier was not so thick as the first, but they were longer getting through it, because there was no subterranean passage to take them, and they were forced to thread narrow ledges that angled here and there through breaks in the rock wall, and into crevasses where there was no footing and they had to suspend their weight on their arms and hands or brace their feet against the sides.

They descended gradually until they were again at the base of the barrier. Dusk found them deep into the virgin timber. "This Cree country," warned Wattanooka. "Maybe they here, maybe not here. Who can tell?"

They were up at dawn the following morning, and emerged from the timber onto a great stretch of barren country, where granite mounds reached to the horizon, like small rolling swells on an ocean. The pair, two atoms moving across the surface of a dead planet, toiled onward all that day and the next, to find themselves at last in another belt of virgin timber.

It was just at sundown of the fourth day that the two reached the farther edge of this forest, and cautiously approached the banks of a small river where, from the concealment of a dense growth of willows, they could see Randall's mysterious stone castle.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Suddenly that Fokker burst into flames and dove vertically

The Last Patrol

Dick Royce was glad this was to be his last flight over No Man's Land; but he little knew what a swift turn life—and death—could take, in the clouds

By FRANK WEAD

ONE by one, five tiny Spads turned away from the operating line and taxied across the airdrome at Rembercourt. The field was rough and they taxied slowly, wings dipping from side to side like queer waddling insects.

At the far end of the field the leader swung around into the wind. The other four ships kicked into position behind him, using short vicious bursts of gun and full rudder. When they were all in V formation, each pilot raised a gloved hand to show that he was ready. The leader lifted his fist for an instant and gave his ship the gun. Like five kites pulled on a single string they raised their tails, ran smoothly along the field and lifted into the air.

In the leading ship Dick Royce shot a swift glance over his instruments. Everything n o r m a l. He climbed straightaway for a moment and then eased his throttle back to cruising speed, fourteen hundred revs. Over his shoulder he saw that the other four Spads had jockeyed neatly into position, stepped equally out and above his tail.

He turned the formation in slow circles to the right, still climbing. His last patrol! He'd be glad when it was over. He was fed up with it, tired of

slaughter, tired of coming into the mess room at night and seeing vacant chairs.

At first he had hoped that those missing buddies, bound so close to him by the laughter and bitterness of war, might saunter carelessly in when the meal was half over and slouch down into their seats as they always had.

Time had taught him to ignore those vacant places and to wipe ruthlessly from his mind the images of those who had "gone west." Only once had he been fooled. That was at Saints, when Bill Lewis had been shot down, but had staggered home in the middle of the night and pulled them out of bed to celebrate his return from hell. Two days later a replacement was sitting in Bill's seat, and Bill didn't return from any place, that time.

Five long months of it for Dick—from April to August without a rest, shifted ceaselessly between Amiens and the Toul-Nancy sector, ever stemming some fresh onrush of the crimson tide of war. It had been great in the earlier days, when the First Pursuit Group was new and they were learning the game together, wild to test themselves against the Germans. Those old-timers were all leading flights or squadrons now, and almost every week there were green men behind them—or a new leader out front.

He was fed up with it. Tired of being pointed out as an ace with eleven Boches shot down; tired of chasing tails in a mad swirl of fury and dodging some loose Jerry diving in from the side, spitting vicious lead at tanks and engine and body; tired of sweating with new pilots who could hardly fly, let alone fight; tired of trying to keep track of who was dead and who was alive. . . .

Going home! That very morning the C. O. had called him in. They needed a man with experience to take charge of pursuit training in the States; did he want the job? Did he want a million dollars! The papers were on the C. O.'s desk, waiting to be signed. His last patrol!

DICK glanced at his altimeter. Ten thousand feet. It was getting cold, and he shrugged his neck down into his fur-lined monkey suit and wiggled his fingers in his heavy gloves. Far below him the tan turf of the airdrome stood out from its surroundings and the hangars and buildings looked like a toy village of colored cardboard. He glanced at the four Spads behind him. Each one was exactly in position.

"They're flying well to-day," he muttered.

The blur of their props cut shiny disks in the air. Little feathers of black smoke puffed unevenly out of their long exhaust pipes. Dick stared at each ship in turn, noting the black muzzles of their machine guns and the shiny gloss of their olive drab wings. They looked almost new, but nearly all of them were marked with bullet holes and one or two were stained with blood. The sky was overcast. There were solid clouds around eighteen or twenty thousand feet.

He glanced at each pilot. He'd had dozens exactly like these four. In number two and three positions behind him were Wilkins and Brown, two new men just up from Issoudon. They didn't even know enough about it to be worried yet. They thought it was all just a fine game or a joy ride. He'd been that way once, crazy to get a Boche. Budding aces! Now all he wanted was to keep the Jerries from getting him.

Behind the two green men were Red Wallace and Doug Squires, six weeks on the front, each with two kills to his credit. They called them experienced pilots now. They were supposed to look after the two green men in front of them.

Dick hoped that they would look after themselves. From the start he had put Squires down as yellow. The fellow was nervous as a cat on the ground. In the air he kept his eyes glued on his instruments and he never saw anything else. His landings were terrible, couldn't seem to find the ground. He had a whipped smile and his forehead sweated nervously.

And Red Wallace, hero of the Battle of Paris, wearer of the Croix de Cognac, the pride of the canteen girls. Nonchalant, happy-go-lucky, good-looking; no one could tell him anything about flying. Wore a girl's silk stocking instead of a warm helmet. Always playing to the grand stand, and belittling the records of the old-timers.

"All you need to be an ace is plenty of chances," Wallace had said sneeringly. "Wait till I've been in this war a few months."

"And all *you* need to be pushin' up daisies is one chance," some one replied. "They'll pat you in the face with an Army spade and there won't be any flowers, or people walkin' slow behind you, either."

Dick never felt sure of Red. He could fly, but one never could tell what he would do in a pinch. He thought of the long hours that he had labored with these four, trying to weld them into a fighting team, vainly trying to drive home the fine points of fighting in the air.

He taught them to boresight and synchronize their guns, to calibrate every round of their ammunition and load it in their belts. He had taken them up one by one and showed them the little tricks of dog-fighting that meant the difference between life and death when close in against a Fokker. And he had tried to teach them to work together in their fighting—with small success. He sighed with relief as he remembered that his responsibility would soon be ended.

FIFTEEN thousand feet. "This'd freeze the toes off an Eskimo monkey," he muttered between chattering teeth.

He swung the flight through a smooth right turn and headed for the Verdun sector, slowly climbing. Things had been quiet along their part of the front; he had never been in a really tough scrap with this bunch of pilots. Glad of it. A few small dog-fights, that was all. It didn't matter now. Pilots were all alike. When they began to get good you lost them or they went west.

When he had first been given a flight to lead, Dick had dreamed of building up a circus of his own, with pilots fighting, not individually, but together, coöperating, trusting and relying upon each other, increasing their own safety and driving death and fear into the hearts of the Jerries. He had visualized its growing reputation as his circus swept through victory after victory in the sky. He had worked and planned and instructed—and slowly his dream had died along with a lot of other silly ideas about war and glory. He was content now to teach them what he could, to get through patrols without losing too many of them. He was stale; sick of war.

They passed over the lines at eighteen thousand feet, trenches and No Man's Land a dull spotted blur beneath

them. He stared at the battle-scarred earth where men mangled each other for a few feet of bloody ground. War in the air was clean, and man to man. Steadily Dick led the flight on towards Germany. As they passed to the right of Verdun he heard a harsh cough below him and saw black puffs from German shrapnel. He smiled and changed course twenty degrees to the left. They were too high for Archie to hurt them. The enemy gunners dotted the sky with a barrage of bursting shells. Dick kept throwing them off by changing course after each salvo. None of the bursts came up to their level and they were usually behind the flight.

The formation was almost in the clouds now. At times the gray stuff wrapped itself around the wings of Wallace and Squires, clutching at struts and wires, so that they were out of sight for a moment. No blinding sun to guard against to-day. Dick hoped that the clouds might hide them a little from the Jerries; but he doubted it. They were on the floor anyway, nothing could be above them.

Suddenly, below and ahead of him Dick saw three black dots flying in V formation! In a moment his peering eyes separated each dot into three wings and a fuselage. Fokker triplanes!

He seesawed his Spad gently from side to side to get the feel of it and to attract the attention of the other pilots. He didn't like Spads very well. They flew sloppily, compared to an SE5; but they had a geared Hisso that put out a few more horsepower and gave them a little more ceiling than most of the other ships on the front; and it was usually the man on top when things started who went home and got medals pinned on him after a dog-fight.

Spads had the gliding angle of a rock, and you could jerk them out of it after a five thousand foot power dive and know that the wings were going to stay with you. Of course, the pilot's feet were right up against the engine and the oil rotted boots faster than flight pay could buy them. At that, he would rather be sitting in one of these than in lots of other ships he'd flown.

THE three Jerries, apparently unaware of the Spads in the cloud-fringe above them, continued steadily towards the Allied lines. Dick's heart skipped a beat.

"They're decoys," he thought. "There's probably twenty more of them hanging in the clouds like we are."

He dropped down about fifty feet and tried to see ahead of him. Then he zoomed back up into position again. The slipstream blew the wet clouds icily against his face and he shivered and pulled his head down behind the windshield. He signaled attention with his flippers and sensed that the rest of the flight had tightened in on him.

Foolish to dive too soon. The Jerries were a couple of thousand feet below them now. He wanted to get in just the right position before he started anything. The Fokkers passed out of sight under the leading edge of his wing.

"They must be blind!" he muttered incredulously.

He fired two short bursts to warm his guns and wiggled his flippers twice. Then he cut the throttle and shoved the stick forward, pushing the Spad over the hump and straight down. He twisted the ship through a half turn with the rudder. He never started a dive with power—you came out with

too much speed and it made the ship stiff and hard to handle.

He eased the nose up into a shallow dive and poured the soup to her so that his shots would go out fast. Still the Jerries did not move! He steadied the near side of his ring sight on the leading Fokker, moving stick and rudder gently to keep on. His thumb pressed firmly, smoothly down on the triggers.

He saw the other two Fokkers turn to right and left in steep climbing turns, seeking to get around on his tail. His tracers ripped into the fuselage of the Fokker ahead of him. He knew that the Jerry was going down. He always knew, now.

The Fokker pulled up in a steep *chandelle* with Dick turning smoothly close on his tail, both guns spitting out lead. Midway in its turn the Fokker shuddered like a stricken thing; then stalled, side-slipped, and fell crazily into a spin, with the gun still on.

Dick sighed shakily. He pulled up in a steep zoom, gaining every possible inch of altitude. He saw Brown's Spad shoot past him, an indistinguishable blur.

"Came down too fast and missed his man," he murmured. He turned back towards the other ships.

Red Wallace dived viciously, and closed with the Jerry that Brown had missed. Off to the right Wilkins was chasing tails with his man, while Doug Squires hung above them, waiting a chance to dive in from the side. Suddenly Wallace's target dove steeply, slowly turning onto its back. Dick followed it down with his eyes until it blended abruptly into the war-torn earth.

Doug Squires dove towards the last Jerry with twin streaks of flame leaping from his prop. The two ships seemed to blend into one and Dick thought that surely they had collided. And then Doug zoomed clear. The German kept turning, with Wilkins close on his tail. A thin feather of white smoke crept out of the Fokker fuselage, and suddenly that whole ship was a mass of flames. It dove vertically towards the earth. Half-way down a black body leaped clear of the flaming Fokker.

DICK'S heart lifted with relief. Five to three—it should have been easy. He had tried to teach them to pick their targets instead of diving blindly down to attack. It had never worked out so smoothly before. Wilkins had his first German, now. They'd celebrate that when they got back.

"Twelve for me now," Dick muttered. A picture of each one of his kills flashed before his eyes. Each incident was indelibly engraved on his mind.

He zoomed to attract the attention of the other Spads, then peered around the sky in a vain search for other foes. Red Wallace triumphantly pulled a loop and a double roll before he dropped into his place in the formation. Squires eased cautiously in from the side as though he hated to get close to the other ships.

"You can tell these birds by the way they fly," Dick thought.

Again the five tiny ships jockeyed along in a V. Dick glanced at his watch. Only thirty minutes more on patrol. He turned parallel to the lines, climbing slowly to regain the altitude lost in fighting down. He held both arms over his head and shook hands with himself in silent approbation for the benefit of those behind him. He was glad that he had a good patrol to quit

on. But the victory had brought no thrill to him. It was like ashes in his mouth.

He thought of the party they would throw that night. There wasn't any kick in drinking, any more; and since Danny Connell had died he hated to hear any one sing or play the piano. It was Danny who had beat the box for them at Issoudon and Toul. Musical, laughing, carefree, happy-go-lucky Danny, gone west with lead from a German Spandau in his heart but with a song and a smile on his lips nevertheless.

In Dick's mind pounded the *clickety-click, clickety-click* of a dinky French train, bearing him towards the seacoast and a transport and home. He just wanted to pack his clothes and sneak quietly out of the camp. He thought of the queer noises that had kept him awake through sleepless nights—lorries lumbering along near-by roads, the tramp of marching men, heavy gunfire in the distance, and a noisy phonograph squalling drunkenly and metallically in the next room.

He thought again of those early days at Issoudon and along the front. From the start they had put him down as a ruthless, cold-blooded killer. Lots of them could fly better than he could. Lots of them could outshoot him. But he had dash and courage that carried him on ahead of them. In learning close dog-fighting at Issoudon when two ships dove at each other, he soon saw that one of them must give way to avoid collision. And at once he made up his mind that it would never be he who yielded. Time and again—once with both guns h o p l e s s l y jammed—he had bluffed his enemy into giving ground, bluffed him into eternity. It had been weeks since he'd had that old urge to kill and tear and maim. He didn't care. He was glad that it was over.

THEY cruised slowly along at fifteen thousand feet, well below the clouds. The sky seemed deserted. At the end of the sector Dick turned the flight toward home. Then suddenly it happened!

The sky rained Fokkers for an instant, and the five Spads scattered like a bursting shell as the dog-fight fanned out across the sky. The German attack swept so unexpectedly from upper nothingness upon them that Dick was dazed for a moment. He sensed that the other four Spads had pulled up in vicious climbing turns to escape those searching streams of lead ripping into their fuselages and eagerly seeking their bodies.

He felt something tug at the structure of his Spad just behind his back and he threw the ship desperately into a smooth *chandelle*. He saw that they were badly outnumbered, that above and around them idle Fokkers were calmly waiting for Spads to turn into their sights as they blindly dodged the more imminent death on their tails.

Dick's fingers shook as he pushed the throttle forward and the Hisso turned up full gun in a thundering flood of power. Something blurred before his eyes and blotted out the rings in his sight. From the first instant of the attack he seemed only to want an opportunity to escape.

A white-striped Fokker was circling close behind him, its bullets tearing at Dick's tail. Dick flew with uncanny smoothness, getting every ounce of speed and turn and climb out of his tiny ship. His eyes were glued over his tail at the Fokker behind him.

Slowly the distance between them widened as they chased tails in madly

swirling circles. Slowly Dick's sight crept around until he could see the Jerry's tail through his rings. There it stuck. The two ships were evenly matched. Vainly he tried to close those few feet and put his bullets into that helmeted figure, sitting so coolly in the Fokker's cockpit. He eased his ship down a few feet, gaining speed.

A shadow flitted through the sky on his right, diving in on him from the side, spitting twin streams of fiery lead at the little Spad. Something warned Dick to pull off. Some inner voice urged him to get clear before burning bullets tore into his warm body. Instead, he recklessly pushed his Spad further down to gain more speed. Then suddenly he swerved out, then back in and up, and his sight steadied for a brief instant on the plane ahead of him.

There was no leap of joy in his heart as he pressed the triggers home. He saw his tracers rip through the fabric and into the enemy cockpit. He felt the gentle searching tug of bullets at the side of his own fuselage and a queer thumping on the floorboards at his feet. Through his right thigh he felt the burning sear of a white-hot iron. His left wing jerked as the hail of lead passed on through it and uselessly off into space. He instinctively ducked his head as the wheels of the second enemy narrowly missed his top wing.

The first German had climbed halfway onto his back, stalled, and fell crazily, the black crosses wabbling wing over wing until it finally worked into a spin.

DICK glanced swiftly at the second German as it swept through a *renversement* and headed back towards him. Automatically he turned towards it. They were at the same altitude. They headed straight at each other for an instant, each ship vainly spitting lead at the other's engine. Dick gripped his stick, ready for a quick move to dodge the other.

With terrific speed the Fokker and the Spad swept together. Dick started to dive below the German. Then memories of Issoudon leaped into his mind and viciously he held his course. The German faltered momentarily and gave way. He dove under Dick, leaving the Spad many precious feet on top.

As they rushed past each other in a blur of speed, Dick kicked desperately through a half roll. He beat his foe to the turn and came out on his tail as the Boche threw his ship into a bank and turned away from him.

Like a tiger leaping to its kill Dick pressed his advantage home. His breath came in gasping sobs. His body was soaked with sweat under his heavy flying suit. His arm and shoulder ached from throwing the chunky little Spad around. He felt something awkward and heavy in his lap and moved his knees—his monkey suit was stiff with blood!

He pressed his eye into the rubber guard of his sight, and nursed the Fokker carefully onto the near side of the speed ring. His thumb bore gently down on the triggers as the two ships swept in tight circles through the sky.

The German pilot's head flopped limply forward and the Fokker dove earthward in a last flight towards death.

Now abruptly it was peaceful and calm. Dick swiftly searched the gray sky and mottled earth for other enemy ships. The mad frenzy of the dogfight had carried him off to one side and clear of the rest of the scrap. He was alone. Relief seethed in a grate-

ful warm flood through his veins, and as the tension lifted he eagerly turned for home.

He pictured the other four Spads, hopelessly outnumbered, quickly shot down, lying broken and mangled in the cratered earth below him. He visualized the enemy pilots circling aimlessly over their kills, like lazy buzzards gorged with fresh red meat. He thought of the two green pilots who hadn't had time to learn what it was all about; of the white, drawn face of Doug Squires and the debonair nonchalance of Red Wallace.

There wouldn't be any party in the quarters that night. Instead of a party there'd be four empty chairs. And then there'd be replacements sitting in those four seats—for some other flight leader to train. The last patrol! Going home! Home!

Biting fear gnawed at Dick's heart. He wanted to be out of it, wanted to reach the safety of the airdrome at Rembercourt before some unexpected happening shattered his dream of the States. He shot his gun on full and pushed the stick down in a shallow high speed dive for the Allied lines.

He glanced back in terror that a German might be on his tail. He was suddenly cold. His teeth chattered and he was very tired. His hand trembled on the stick. He yearned for more speed than his battered Spad had in it.

SUDDENLY, off to the right and behind him, he saw that the sky was dotted with ships. His heart stood still as he recognized some Spads among them. He stared, unbelieving.

The Spads, hopelessly outnumbered by Fokkers, were twisting and swirling in a mad fight for life. He saw them take advantage of every fleeting chance to spit death at their foes. Again and again a Spad, regardless of red streaks of murder ripping into it and blocking its path, turned to bring relief and succor to some hard-pressed comrade, driving the enemy clear by sheer audacity. Again and again a Spad, under heavy fire from a pack of Boche, escaped death by a miracle.

Dick stared, aghast that frail things of wood and wire and flesh could weather that vicious hail of lead. Two Fokkers went whirling deathward out of control. Spads turned, twisted, zoomed, dove and climbed across the sky, reeling in a mad chase with the grim gray spectre of death.

An inner voice whispered a warning to Dick, urging him to dash for safety in time. But his heart lifted with joy as the four Spads fought together with masterly skill. He felt somehow as though they were a part of his handiwork. He jerked his ship up in a steep climbing turn and headed back toward the fight.

Now he climbed eagerly, full gun. It seemed hours before he was within striking distance of the first pair of whirling ships. He saw Red Wallace's pink silk-stockinged helmet, as he viciously chased tails with a Jerry. A second Fokker dove at Red from the side, vomiting whining bullets that sang a hymn of death. Dick neatly took the second Fokker with two shots.

Dick Immelmanned back toward the plane that was chasing tails with Red, and dove on it from behind. His first bursts were far back along the fuselage. A frightened white face peered back at him; the Jerry pilot, panic-stricken at this unexpected attack, whirled clear in a steep diving sideslip that carried him hopelessly out of the fight.

Dick did not follow him down. He pulled up in a steep zoom, gaining alti-

tude. Red Wallace zoomed up alongside of him with a wave of greeting, his face grinning from ear to ear. He yelled something unintelligible at Dick as they dove together into the swirling mêlée of ships ahead of them.

There were now seven Fokkers against five Spads. The Germans had been playing it safe, taking few chances, content to wait until they could dive in without fear of return fire. Only sheer desperation and nerve and luck had saved those tiny Spads, now raked and torn and gouged and ripped with the impact of many bullets. Some queer twist of Fate had kept engines and tanks intact and deflected bullets labeled "Death" into mere scratches and tears in monkey suits. Wings ripped and tattered, spars weakened by little nests of bullet-drilled holes, clothing and control surfaces ripped by biting lead, still those Spads fought viciously on.

Dick glowed with pride as he saw Wilkins and Brown fighting coolly like aces of long experience, while Doug Squires flitted nervously across the sky, pausing here and there to strike with deadly fangs at the enemy.

A vicious rage swept over Dick. A red mist hung before his eyes and the lust to kill and maim and destroy welled up in his throat. Red Wallace was hurling his Spad gleefully into the fight.

A Fokker swept across Dick's sight. He turned after it and jammed the triggers home. It hung for an instant and wabbled down out of control. He screamed with murderous rage as his tracers ripped into it.

NONE of them could tell exactly what happened after that. The sky was a blurred mass of twisting Fokkers and Spads. Time and again Dick half-rolled desperately away from the death *rat-tat-tatting* at his back. Time and again he swept onto the tail of a Boche and spewed death from between flashing propeller blades, only to be forced off before he could make certain of his kill. Time and again he hurled his Spad at a Fokker and forced his plane home until it seemed that his wheels must lock with the wing tips of the enemy. His gun jammed for an instant. He thought that he was out of ammunition. But as he desperately jerked at the charging lever, it started shooting again.

He screeched like a maniac as he darted across the sky, his words inaudible even to himself above the thunder of the Hisso. He relished the thrill of killing, and openly courted death, ignoring the German bullets that ripped into his ship.

Suddenly the furor of combat died away. In vain he swept the sky for foes. Far below him Dick saw two streams of smoke rising lazily from among some trees, and as he stared a triplane hit the ground and burst into flames. Far in back of him he saw two Fokkers diving toward Germany. The fight was ended!

Dick swerved his Spad slowly toward Rembercourt, half fainting from exhaustion and loss of blood. He relaxed in his seat and wearily closed his eyes. They were low on gas. Some of them wouldn't make back. He suddenly sat erect and searched the sky for the rest of his flight. There, above and in back of him were four scattered Spads.

He felt suddenly sick as he glided slowly toward the field at Rembercourt. Off to his right a Spad kicked through a barrel roll and he knew that Red Wallace, at least, was unhurt.

The trees at the edge of the field

rose up to meet him—and his engine sputtered and quit, out of gas. He barely lifted the ship over the trees, and then nosed down again. He couldn't seem to see the ground. Then suddenly his wheels were running smoothly along the turf and he pulled the stick back into his stomach and kicked her over toward the hangars.

He watched the other ships hover and head into the field one by one. None of them made a very good landing, but they all got down safely. A peaceful calm was in Dick's heart as he stared at the battered Spads, fabric and struts torn and chewed by German bullets. He sighed with relief as a pilot clambered awkwardly from each tiny ship and stretched the cramps from his body. Dick crawled out of his cockpit and walked unsteadily toward the C. O.'s office.

The C. O. was seated at his desk, signing a paper in front of him. Dick reached a shaking hand for the paper and pulled it out from under the C. O.'s pen. He was tattered and dirty. His tall figure slouched wearily. His eyes were bloodshot and his face was streaked with smoke and oil. The C. O. stared at him and at his blood-soaked flying suit.

"Dick! What happened?"

"Nothing happened," said Dick, tearing the paper into small pieces and dropping them into the waste basket. "You can get some other bird to go home and teach those kiwis how to fly. I'm going to stay on here."

A grin of pride swept over his face and he added: "Man, oh man! You ought to see those wild cats of mine fight! I've got a circus, kid. A real, honest-to-God flying circus!"

THE END.

Cow-Pilots

AIRPLANES may revolutionize cattle ranching. Before very many years cowboys may mount airplanes instead of cow ponies. In fact, there is already an isolated instance or two where ranchers have purchased airplanes for utilitarian purposes about the ranch.

Up in the buffalo grass region around Miles City, Montana, a foreman of the large Quarter-Circle XN ranch, taking a casual airplane ride over the range, discovered a herd of yearlings that had strayed to an isolated corner of the twenty-five-thousand-acre ranch near the Bad Lands.

To-day the Quarter-Circle XN has two airplanes that go out on regular scouting expeditions to hunt up stray herds. Other ranchers in that country are considering the airplane, too, as a means of saving thousands of dollars in lost cattle annually.

These ranchers declare that the finding of as few as one hundred steers will pay for an airplane. It is not infrequent for cowboys on horseback to lose track of even more than that number of wandering steers.

It may not be long now until cows will be branded on the back, instead of on the flank, so sky-ranging waddies can spot their own brand. Perhaps cowboys of the future will be called cow-pilots. Who knows?

Harold J. Ashe.

A dozen revolvers cracked, making the corridor a place of death

Caged

With all the forces of Society railroading him toward the electric chair, Joe Barry faces the climax of his life in the Criminal Courts Building

By COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE BARRY comes from a small Missouri town to conquer New York—and finds Broadway indifferent to a country lad and his accordion. Friendless, he hits bottom when he is fired from his job as entertainer in Louie's cheap spaghetti restaurant, because he had yielded to the lure of spring to escape from his slum lodgings and spend a day and night wandering in the country around Newburgh.

An occasional patron of the restaurant picks him up in his car, and calling himself a Wall Street attorney, Martin, offers the discouraged youth $10,000 to step into the shoes of a client of his, accused of violating the Jones Act. He gives Joe a thousand in cash, tells him the sentence would only be a couple of years.

Joe, who would just as soon die as continue his slum life, and sees this as a means of escape, agrees to Martin's proposition of thinking it over during a day's holiday in the country, and promises to meet Martin at his own lodging at midnight.

This story began in the Argosy for March 15.

He goes to a Pennsylvania town for his holiday, and spends the day at the circus. Seeing a fine professional accordion in a vacant tent, he picks it up and plays—and is pressed into service to fill in for a missing performer at a radio broadcast. He is deeply interested in the circus life, and hates to lie to Sue Dayton, the equestrienne, and her Uncle Dan, who owns the circus; but he tells them his name is Joe Bradley, and that he will have to see about getting out of his other job before he can accept their offer to go with the circus.

Going back to New York determined to turn Martin down, he enters his room at midnight—and is almost immediately arrested by police. Detective Pete Maxwell finds a Thompson machine gun and two automatics, and some marked bills, in his bureau drawer. Joe is indicted for double homicide—identified as the machine gunner on a booze truck near Newburgh that night. Martin proves to have been an alias, and Louie and the waiter Full-House describe "Martin" falsely.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GANGSTER'S TRUMP.

THEY came for Joe's cellmate in the Tombs, Hymie Fradke, the next morning and led him away, Joe did not know where. At noon they brought him back again, nervous, lighting one cigarette from another, barely tasting his food. When Joe asked him concerning his trial, he only rolled his eyes and spread an expressive hand.

"I ain't saying nothing!" he answered noncommittally. He was silent until they came to return him through the Bridge of Sighs to the Criminal Courts building for the afternoon session. The long hours passed for Joe, in sodden staring about his cell, in mingling with the other prisoners during exercise hours in the corridors. At last Hymie came back again. He was more nervous now, like a sleek animal eying its every surrounding in the hope of an opening. At last he broke forth:

"Keep a guy sitting in that cage all day long! They didn't even begin my trial!"

"Everything's cages around here," said Joe wearily.

"Yeah? Well, anyway, I got to cross a hall without one around it. I'm on the fourth floor; the detention room's across the hall there. Fine on a guy's friends," he growled softly. "Keeping a guy caged up all day and then doing nothing!"

As night came, he seemed more stealthy, more excited. He walked up and down, his lips moving. Suddenly, however, he halted, and looking at Joe as if just realizing he was there, he asked:

"Got any jack, Wet-ears?"

"Money, you mean? No, they took it all away from me when I was arrested."

"Say, you are a Wet-ears, ain't you?" He explained nothing more until he made ready for his bunk. Then, reaching into his shoe, he removed the insole and brought forth two tightly folded bills from beneath it. "Here, Wet-ears," he said. It was a crisp, new twenty-dollar yellowback.

Joe took the currency with some surprise.

"They told me I could get money from my envelope whenever I needed any," he said.

"Suppose you get hold of a right screw that'll sell you a paper of snow? They won't give you money downstairs for that. I got mine!" he whispered after a time. "I know when I'll use it, too."

Nor was there an explanation of that remark. He only paced for a while, sat on his bunk, eyed Joe eagerly, like a man obsessed with inner thoughts, then turned away, silent. The night passed, with its myriad noises.

Hymie made ready for another day in the cage, awaiting his turn in the court room. He shaved carefully. He fussed over his tie, he brought a clean shirt from a bundle in the corner, and brushed his suit with his hands. Suddenly he turned to Joe, whispering excitedly.

"Tell you what I'll do!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet you twenty I beat Dannemora!"

Joe reached for the money.

"It's your twenty, you know," he said.

"Yeah?" Hymie blinked with memory. "That's right! No fun betting against my own money."

A few minutes later he was taken away to wait anew in the detention room. Joe went back to his bunk; almost immediately he was on his feet again. The guard had returned and was unlocking the door, this time for him.

Pete Maxwell was waiting to check him out over the Bridge of Sighs; soon again they were moving through the long, caged mezzanine above the rotunda, at last to reach the grille-gate at the steps and await its opening by the guard. Then down the long, broad staircase they traveled, and once more into the magistrate's court on the first floor, where the cage held some twenty men of whom Joe became a silent member.

FEW people were in the court room; detectives, court attachés, the judge and clerks. One by one, guards came to the door, opened it and beckoned men out, pulling the light door, with its ordinary reversed spring lock, swiftly shut behind them as the prisoner passed forth.

They disappeared after that; Joe did not know where they went; he could only see a blur of forms before the judge, a momentary discussion of some sort, and then a prisoner go forth under guard, perhaps back to the Tombs, perhaps to freedom. Jail life for Joe had been a series of splotchy pictures with but little absorption.

Now and then new men came to take the place of those who had departed, some unfettered until they were bound by the confines of the cage, some handcuffed.

One was in an Oregon boot, a heavy, block-like thing of steel which fitted about his ankle and which he dragged with effort. They brought him in, and unfastened the heavy burden for a brief rest while he was in the cage. Joe watched them with wide eyes. He'd never seen a man trussed like this.

Steadily the calls came for prisoner after prisoner; one by one they passed forth until only three men remained in the big, steel-wire cage: a voluble Italian, Joe Barry, and the blocky, black-featured man who slouched there, one foot extended as if in constant waiting for the heavy steel handicap, now lying in disuse upon the floor.

Then they came for the Italian and took him forth. A second guard entered, closed the door behind him and,

motioning to the blocky prisoner, began the affixing of the Oregon boot that he might be ready for his summons. But as he raised it to snap about the extended ankle he paused and listened, his head turned sharply toward the outer court room door.

A queer sound had come from far above. It was a thudding sound, like a flat piece of lumber falling, yet with an echo. Then it came twice more.

Outside the door some one shouted. Then came other reports, heavy, thunderous; more cries sounded. Some one ran past the cage. Up on his bench, the judge raised, slammed his book and turned hurriedly for chambers. Another court attaché passed on the run. Pete Maxwell followed, and other detectives—soon the entire court room was heading for the corridor.

THEN from the very head of the grilled stairs, the sounds came anew—and this time their identity was clear. They were the swift, deep cracking of revolvers, not one, but a dozen; a frosted door panel tinkled and spread its crashing glass to the floor; across the court room the wall seemed to pop, sending plaster in a puffing cloud.

There were shouts, the sound of many running forms, the wild cry of some one cursing above the clatter of gun-fire; a third shot took half the glass from the transom.

With that the guard clicked the lock of the Oregon boot, swung to his feet, glanced at the almost deserted court room, and with a leap reached the cage door. He unlocked it, he swung it wide and darted through, then with the over-strength of excitement, slammed it heavily behind him and ran forth to the corridor, not looking back.

Joe Barry moved forward. The door had struck and rebounded too swiftly for the snap-lock to find its receptacle; now it swung wide to its full extent, struck against its stop and then moved lazily back on the rebound. A form passed Joe; it was the prisoner in the Oregon boot. But he did not seek flight. He merely stood there and as the door came to the jamb, his big hand closed over it, meshing it into its jamb. Joe Barry turned away; like an animal he had seen a cage door wide before him; like an animal he had been afraid to risk what freedom held for him.

Wilder grew the sounds from outside; a hundred voices shouting now. There were more shots—from the sides of the mezzanine corridor, from the rotunda, from the stairway, where some one evidently stood at bay.

"Look out!" It was one voice above all the rest. "He's got a shot left! You up there on the mezzanine, pull down on him!"

Then another voice sounded.

"Close in on him, down there in the rotunda."

"Wait for that last shot!"

Then men came flooding into the court room, huddling at the door. A guard, with sanity returning for an instant, ran and looked into the cage where stood Joe and the man in the Oregon boot, still with his hand raised against the jamb of the door.

"They're all right," the guard muttered. Then a lone shot came from the stairway, followed immediately by the booming of a dozen guns. The crowd rolled from the doorway, the noise of many feet retreated toward the stairs. Then came a clatter at the street doors and in the rotunda, accompanied by the shouts of officers to clear the building.

The man in the Oregon boot looked

swiftly about him, toward the deserted court room, the faint view of policemen, guards and attachés in the rotunda, struggling with the street mob which now was flooding into the building. The big muscles of his right shoulder bunched. Joe, staring, saw him slowly pull back the door.

"All right, kid!" he commanded. "Lam it!"

Joe gasped. The door had been closed, yet now it was open; dazedly he understood. That great hand had raised just in time to catch it and hold the hasp a fraction of an inch from its receptacle. Now, it stood open, beckoning.

"Lam it!"

"But you?"

"Me?" The prisoner grinned. "With this?" He eyed the steel boot on his right ankle. Suddenly he scowled. "Lam it, I said. Think you can wait all day?"

His free arm went forth and caught Joe by the shoulder, whirling him through the door.

"Keep your head!" he whispered. "They won't think to check up for an hour—not as long as there's one man in here! Jam in with the crowd and let 'em ease you out!"

FURTIVE, Joe reached the corridor. Some one caught him by an arm, swinging him angrily about, and half throwing him against a crowd of others much the same as he, milling forms being herded by excited men in uniform.

"Out of the building there!" a voice sounded. "Make it snappy. Out of the building!"

Another policeman caught him and pushed him forward. The action half turned Joe about, so that he could look toward the broad, castle-like stairway. The crowd there had parted for an instant, to reveal the sprawled form of a man. A sleek man, with form-fitting clothing and gleaming hair.

An automatic revolver lay a few steps below, where it had fallen from his grasp. The head was rolled back, the eyes were open, staring upon things they could not see. Hymie Fradke had kept his boast. He had beaten Dannemora.

"Go, go, go on—don't stand around all day!" They were moving Joe again, with a hundred others. Slowly, toward the door, like a subway jam they shoved, while every nerve in Joe's body screamed for speed; but his feet only shuffled. At last free air caught him; the throng, tightened in the confines of the door, pressed madly there, then burst to the outer steps.

"Keep moving!" shouted a policeman. "Get off those steps!"

Joe obeyed. Now he was on the last tier, now on the sidewalk.

"Keep moving, you—off the block!" A mounted man had ridden to the curbing and was waving a gloved hand at the throng there. "Off the block!"

Joe Barry went on. At the end of the block he passed more mounted men; a car rounded the corner before him, its siren screaming, its tonneau loaded with policemen. Motor cycles roared up, with side-car machine gunners. Then a patrol went clanging by. Joe Barry walked on.

Within his brain, there dinned and shrieked the command to run. His nerves twitched with the desire. He could all but hear the words: "Run—run—for God's sake, run!"

But the man only continued to walk, with the thousands of other free persons who cluttered the sidewalks; he only continued to look about him with

narrow, frightened eyes; he only licked at his lips and walked on.

Far uptown, an hour later, wearied by repression, his legs aching from the exertion which had held them to a strolling stride, Joe halted as he passed a small crowd before a radio store. The screaming of a siren, relayed through the exposed loud-speaker had jerked him to attention. He looked about him again, and his tongue darted out over his lips. The loud-speaker chortled:

"Station WNYC Police Alarms. During a desperate effort at freedom to-day at Criminal Courts Building, Hymie Fradke, twenty-eight, New York gangster, was killed by police when he attempted to shoot his way out with a revolver slipped to him by a confederate in the hallway as Fradke was being led from a detention room to the court room for trial.

"During the confusion resulting, a man believed also to be a confederate of Fradke's escaped from a detention cage in Magistrate's Court. His description follows: Joe Barry, twenty-four, dark hair and eyes, height five feet nine, weight one hundred forty-five—"

Joe Barry looked up. A few feet away stood a man in blue and brass, diligently taking down the description in a much-handled notebook. The voice above ceased, giving way to the lilt of a jazz orchestra. The policeman opened his coat and tucked the memorandum within. Then walked on.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAP.

INSTINCTS which Joe Barry did not know he possessed now had assumed control; his brain was a turmoil, his exterior calm. His every conscious instinct stabbed him with admonitions to look back, to be incessantly watchful as he moved away. But his subconscious dictation commanded that he should act like the average man, with no more concern about those near him than any one else.

He wanted to run, but instead, he halted with a loafing throng and for a time watched the strangely elephant-like activities of a quartet of steam shovels chewing at the excavation for a new building. He wanted to hurry to a railroad station and catch the train out of town, but he only wandered along a side-street, looking in a window here and there.

At last, he entered a Turkish bath, and walking silently to the clerk's desk, pulled out the money which Hymie Fradke had given him, placing it in the tin deposit box which the clerk as silently extended him.

As an escaping animal seeks the camouflage of vegetation that will match its protective coloration, so Joe Barry, by instinct, had gone to the one place and the one thing which, for a time, at least, would mean his freedom.

The police were searching for him in the apartments of women, "floor troupers" from night clubs, "kept-ives," and exponents of the "fast twenty" or the "slow five." They were looking for him in pool rooms and cigar stores, restaurants and speakeasies; gradually broadening their search to include everything that once had been the hang-out of a man now dead.

Their search was fruitless for the simple reason that they were looking for a guilty man, not an innocent person who could not frequent such surroundings because he never had known them.

But the police did not know that.

Their quarry was listed as a gangster, a killer and "chopper," a pal and confidant of Hymie Fradke, whose hate of Dannemora had caused him to battle single-handed against the enforcement power of the greatest city in the world.

They were looking for the friend of men who had been daring enough to mill against Fradke and his guard as an elevator halted on the fourth floor of the Criminal Courts Building, thus giving an outflow of people to cover the hasty transfer of an automatic pistol when a killer moved from one cage, across the hall, toward another.

They were not looking for a man who did innocent things because he was an innocent man, and whose mounting desire, ever since he realized that freedom had been literally thrust upon him, was to be clean.

Joe Barry longed for just that. During his city life his one extravagance had been the comparative luxury of a Turkish bath—the welcome heat of the steam room, after clammy nights in the old lodging house on Third Avenue, the ministrations of attendants, the sharp coldness of the swimming pool when he came from beneath the showers.

During such times he had ceased to be a mere mote of city dust; he amounted to something to be scrubbed and rubbed and made fresh, to have his shoes shined and his clothing pressed by the floor boy as he rested under soft blankets in the sleeping quarters.

Now, with the soil of jail upon him, and the odors of the cell block still in his nostrils, he had merely followed natural impulse at the sight of a sign. To the clerk who handed him his key upon its rubber ring, he was just another fellow with a hangover, bearded, soiled, unkempt, seeking the purifying qualities of heat and soap and water after the pollution of liquor.

Joe snapped the rubber band about his wrist and turned first for the barber shop.

ALL this had been done hazily; almost subconsciously. The condition continued until he stepped from the chair, after the extravagance of a shave and a shampoo.

A crumpled tabloid newspaper was on a chair; he sighted a picture on the first page, passed it over with a glance, then looked at it more sharply. A word above the picture had jerked him to attention: heavy, black lettering, followed by a bulky exclamation:

ESCAPE!

He picked up the newspaper, his elbows held tightly against his sides to steady his shaking hands. Again had come the overpowering realization of this omnipotent thing known to him as the police.

He had been free only a short time, but the news of it was already established and old—old enough for one of its carriers to be crumpled, discarded, even by barber shop loungers.

Joe Barry had not realized the safety which lay in that oldness. The swiftness with which the biggest city in the world devours and forgets, gobbling one edition while reaching for the next one, was not fully appreciated by Joe Barry because he had never been truly of the city.

Every one must know him now, he thought.

Suddenly he clicked his teeth with rapidly tightening jaws; his barber had pressed against him, in a survey of the photograph.

"Them guys are certainly getting free with their hardware," the barber

said. "First thing we know, they'll steal the city hall. Tough baby, ain't he?"

Then the barber moved on, leaving Joe Barry still staring at his own photograph. Was the man blind that he could not have seen the resemblance? Joe didn't understand it—that a man could talk to the very person pictured, and not recognize him! But at last Joe Barry glanced into the mirror.

The person he saw mirrored was not the harassed, resentful man who glared at him from a rogues' gallery photograph on that tabloid page. There was the difference between youth and age, innocence and granite hardness.

For the features of the man in the picture were stony with hate; there was a squint to the eyes which did not belong to Joe Barry, a different set to his mouth, and a tightness of his nostrils which made his nose appear sharp and thin. His day's growth of beard had darkened his cheeks sufficiently to make them appear slightly hollowed; he had looked what the picture portrayed him to be, a sullen gangster, hating his captors.

The face that he now looked upon in the mirror was only tired and fagged; a boy worn by grief, and looking piteously at the world, as if trying to understand. The barber returned, and handed him his check, to be settled on his departure from the big bathhouse.

Joe Barry went onward, to the elevator, and to the locker floor, there to be assigned his bed, to divest himself of his clothing, and to give his orders to the floor-boy, as he handed over his shoes for shining and his clothes for the tailor's iron.

"And go out and get me some clean underwear and socks," he ordered, a slight tone of command in his voice. "Size nine on the socks, 36 on the underwear, and a fifteen shirt. Cheapest you can buy. Charge 'em on my check."

"Yas, suh," said the boy, gathering up the shoes and clothing.

JOE went on to the elevator that would carry him to the basement and its baths.

A slightly squinted appearance had come into his eyes, and his mouth was drawing again. Strange ideas had begun to chase through his brain since that barber had failed to recognize his picture; thoughts which pulled his memories back to that first night in the cell with Hymie Fradke when a prisoner had gone nuts down the line.

A touch of cunning was making itself apparent; names were running through his mind; thoughts which had been held subconsciously. But now he was free and he could think. He could figure them out and plan for the future without much thought of himself if he could only accomplish that which demanded fulfillment.

Joe Barry had grown old and grim again by the time he entered the steam room. He gave quick glances about him to see whether any one noticed him.

But no one heeded him, the men in the steam room, the puffing occupants of the showers, the shouting figures, plunging about the big pool.

Joe Barry wondered what the rubbers would do; they who had time to study the men under their energetic manipulations. But they only asked, after the soaping and showering was over, if he would have oil or alcohol. Finally he was back on his floor, and the boy was preceding him to turn down the cover of his bed.

"What time kin Ah call yo'?" he asked.

Joe had sank to the cot, dulled, relaxed for the first time in days. But now he straightened for an instant, and a look of reckoning came to his eye.

"Nine o'clock," he ordered. "I've got to make a train."

He sagged again. He felt the touch of a clean pillow. The coolness of fresh linen was against his neck. Soon he slept, drugged sleep; the boy called him a second time before he stirred. But with wakefulness he whirled from his cot, as if he had forgotten something of vast importance.

His subconscious mind was commanding that he hurry, that he dress and be out of here, that he do the thing he had planned upon. During the time he had lain in the steam room, while he had been under the showers and flaccid beneath the manipulations of the rubbers, the scheme had been forming in his mind; sleep had cemented it.

Joe Barry knew exactly what he must do, the only thing he could do. It was as if some one were at his shoulder advising him, weighing the chances coldly, and looking to the future with a calculation whose rudiments Joe Barry had gained in the cell-block of the Tombs and the interminable cages which had taken from him everything in the world he possessed except this one hope.

Freedom could mean nothing now if he could not gain that. For freedom otherwise was empty. To this grim, tired man, it was nothing that he was physically unfettered. The mental bonds which had been fastened upon him were unbreakable, he knew.

There was no joy in knowing that bars were no longer about him; the mere lack of them could not give him what he wanted. He was sought as a murderer, to be hunted and circularized, to be described to every police office in the country. The mere fact that the law had released its grip momentarily did not change that. Nor did it change the knowledge that as far as the one place in the world he desired to go was concerned, he was a prisoner still.

THIS Martin had done more than "frame" him into the danger of physical death. He had utterly killed his spiritual life. The circus, a girl with golden hair, the ambitions which had come to him during that glad day on the Dayton Brothers show, the hopes, the new world which had opened before him—all these things were dead now, and Martin had killed them.

But there was a way to obtain a slight redress; he had promised it to himself in the Tombs, and now he was in a position to begin its fruition. The invisible advisor seemed to repeat again and again that possibility, as though this were a duty that must be fulfilled.

Grimly, hastily, Joe Barry finished his dressing and hurried downstairs to the settlement of his bill. Then, stuffing the remainder of his twenty-dollar bill into a pocket, he moved swiftly from the building. And the ghost of Hymie Fradke stalked beside him.

Joe only knew the beginnings of his plan—the rest necessarily was hazy. He must make a start. He must go somewhere and hide out. He must wait. He must frequent places where there were people who could give him information.

He must learn everything possible about this Big Friday and strive through him to trace a connection to that mysterious person who had engineered the loss of everything in life that he loved. And first he must have

money! There was a ghastly joke about that. He'd been working on the cash that Martin had given him.

"Eighteenth Street and Third Avenue," he commanded as he opened the door of the nearest taxicab. This time he paid little attention to the speed of the car or the black forms of pedestrians scuttling out of its path.

The lights of Broadway blazed about him for an instant; he did not notice them. The clatter of the Sixth Avenue L sounded above him, stirring him to old memories. But otherwise, there was little reaction. Taut, tense, he sat on the edge of the seat, his fists clenched at his sides, his head forward and eyes narrowed, waiting as the car swept on, or halted interminable minutes for the changing of traffic signals. Over and over he rehearsed his plans, even as Hymie Fradke would have rehearsed them, the chances for success, the chances for failure.

It was nine thirty, best time of all to try it. The lodgers who must arise early would be in their rooms and snoring now. Those who went to their jobs later would still be out at the picture show or loafing at their various hang-outs; there was little visiting or roaming about the halls at this time of night.

Then there was that little alcove just within the door, into which a person could slip and hide, meanwhile viewing the entire stairway and upper hall leading to the fire escape.

Joe had no key—it had traveled with the rest of his personal possessions into a police envelope. He must reach the window leading to the fire escape on the second floor, go quietly through it and to the steel ladder outside, then upward to his own window, never locked. There, sewed in the mattress, lay a treasure which had escaped the police. With that, Joe could do many things; principally it could allow him to live while he strove to patch together the puzzle which he was bent on solving. To get Martin!

THE cab moved on. Again and again Joe thought over his plans. That walk from Eighteenth Street would give him time to study his surroundings. Maybe they might be watching for him there; very good, he would be watching for them. An instantaneous memory flashed through his mind that his accordion still must be in his room; he would take that, too. But principally he must get that money!

The cab stopped, and the driver's hand reached backward for the door. Joe Barry stepped forth and paid his fare. Then, a queer feeling of hesitation slowly beginning to rise within him, Joe Barry started down the street, toward the blank-faced building which once had been his home.

His eyes were wary, constantly shifting beneath the low-pulled brim of his hat; watchful of every shadowy passer-by, every dark form in the distance. A block passed; his step became slower, more careful.

His eyes centered down the block, to a doorway he knew. No one was there. He shifted his gaze to across the street, to the pillars of the L structure, to the next corner. But there were only the ordinary movements of the street, shuffling forms moving casually in the semi-darkness. No police car was visible, no motor cycles, no hint of the unusual.

Joe Barry pressed his lips. He rubbed his hands nervously at his sides; the lobes of his nostrils expanded and contracted with the heightening of breath. A half block more and he

could ease into the ill-lighted door, glancing swiftly ahead as he opened it for the sight of forms above. Then there would be the protection of that alcove; if he could just get there, he could wait hours if necessary for a clear field.

His heart began to pound, trip hammer fashion. His body bent involuntarily; every concentration was on that door now. He could pause outside and listen an instant before he eased it open. He must look swiftly within at the first possible moment, and be ready to run if men waited there.

Involuntarily his right hand raised, as if in readiness to grasp the knob—even though he was still a hundred feet away. He glanced before him, beside him, and toward the door. No one was there. His pace quickened; his every muscle tightened in suspense.

Then suddenly he sagged.

A low, yet sharp whistle had sounded from a black doorway, almost at his elbow. It came again, followed swiftly by a whisper:

"Joe! Joe! You fool! Duck in here!"

The man whirled, he half moved back, swung again and set himself as if to run. But he only remained poised as the voice came again, slightly louder now, and recognizable.

"Joe Barry! Duck, you idiot! Don't you know that dump's lousy with flat-feet?"

Then a dark form moved from the blackness, just far enough to extend a lean arm. Strong fingers caught the suddenly limp right shoulder of Joe Barry and whirled him about. Again came that insistent voice.

"Duck in here, Joe! You fool, do you want to walk straight into the Stinging Lizzie?"

Joe Barry did not resist. Stumbling, unresisting, he allowed himself to be pulled into the doorway, where hands grasped his arms, as if either to support or shake him.

"Joe!" came the voice again. "Ain't you got no sense? That dump's loaded with bulls. We've got to duck—and duck fast. Hear me?" Joe Barry raised his head. His damp hands went upward, rubbing at his fevered face.

"What are you doing here, Full-House?" he asked suddenly. "Why are you trying to help me?"

CHAPTER X.

A FRIEND.

FULL-HOUSE did not answer in particularity. He only swung Joe about, straightening him, and then, moving past him, looked out hastily, up and down the street. Finally he turned, and catching again at Joe's arm, turned him toward the sidewalk.

"Listen, kid!" he commanded. "You do what I say. You get out first and walk fast, back toward Eighteenth Street. I'll be right behind you. If you hear me whistle, you duck, and duck fast. Turn at the first corner and grab a cab. Tell the guy to drive you to Forest Hills. Then wait outside the station in the shadows. Remember that. Maybe we'll be all right. Just can't take any chances."

Joe Barry weaved.

"But why are you doing this, Full-House? Don't you know it's dangerous? They want me for murder!"

"Fold up your chin! I know what I'm doing. Now, lam it!"

Joe hesitated.

"Are you sure they're in the room?" he asked. "I've got to get in there."

"What do you want up there?" asked Full-House in a whisper.

"There's some money. Sewed in the mattress. I've got to get it!"

"You've got to get your damn head to working and lam it while there's a chance!" Full-House snapped. "I got money. Ain't I here to help you? Now lam it!" He gave the man a push. "Do what I tell you. Start walking and don't look back. When you see a taxi, wait till I catch up with you."

Befuddled, dazed by the miracle of another escape and the evidence of friendship upon the part of a person whose last appearance had been a damning one, Joe Barry moved forth in obedience.

He did not know where he was going, he hardly realized that he was walking; this happening had for the moment created an amazement that was all-absorbing. All that he knew was that he was obeying orders, walking swiftly toward Eighteenth Street while another form moved in his rear, ready to warn him of danger.

None appeared. Around the corner a taxi purred at its stand; Joe moved toward it and halted. Instantly, Full-House was beside him and opening the door. Then he swung toward the driver and gave an address on Long Island.

"Hit straight over the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge; lean plenty on the gas!" he commanded.

Then he was within, to slam the door, pull tight the glass panel leading to the driver's seat, and at last slumped beside his silent, staring companion.

"Well, kid," he said as the L posts began to snap past the windows, "we beat that rap, huh? Say, there'd have been plenty waitin' for you if I hadn't been on the job!"

"What did you do it for, Full-House?" Joe asked. The miracle of the warning still was upon him. Full-House leaned forward, his emotionless face outlined for a moment in a passing street lamp.

"I ain't no stool pigeon," he snapped. "Them dicks worked me once; that's enough. I never meant to give you no dirty rap down there at the Bureau. Why the hell didn't you tell a fellow?"

"But there wasn't anything to tell. I was framed, Full-House."

"Don't I know it?" asked the other man. "Since when do I look like a sap?"

JOE BARRY brightened.

"Then you know who did it?" he asked. "Was it Big Friday's gang? How is he mixed up with this man Martin?"

There was a slight pause. Then Full-House leaned closer.

"Tune out a little with that kind of cracking," he commanded. "This skabootch pilot might have good ears." Then: "Who are you talking about?"

"Big Friday, and Martin and a lot of fellows who had it in for Hymie Fradke," answered Joe, striving to hold his voice from excitement. "That was a load of Big Friday's liquor that turned over up on that road. I know that much. And Martin was mixed up with him."

"You got big ears, ain't you?" asked Full-House. "Who tipped you to all that?"

Joe Barry answered with a question:

"But you said you knew I was framed. Who did it?"

"Ask me something I know!" Full-House had turned and was looking out the rear panel to be sure that no one followed. "A blind guy could tell that you'd never pull no chopper job. You ain't got no murder in your system."

"I have now, Full-House," answered Joe Barry quietly.

"Yeah?" Again he was silent for a moment. Then: "Yeah? Who are you figuring on setting over?"

"Martin for one. Maybe Big Friday. Maybe somebody else—if I find out just what others were mixed in it."

Full-House sneered.

"Yeah, and you were walking right straight into the arms of the bulls. Six of 'em scattered around that rooming house."

"Maybe I'll write a letter to one of them some of these days," said Joe.

"Yeah? Who?"

"Pete Maxwell. Along toward the last, I rather got to thinking that he'd taken a liking to me."

Suddenly Joe winced and turned from the window, the old feeling of steel and bars about him. But it was only the fretwork of the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge.

"I'm going to tell him everything I know. I think he'd do his best to turn that gang up. He kind of acted friendly."

"Sure!" snapped Full-House. "He was greasin' the skids to the death-house; that's swell friendship. Feller, ain't you got no sense? That guy's a bull. That's his business, feeding the Stinging Lizzie. Yeh, he's a friend. You ought 've seen him to-night."

"Then he's after me, too?"

"With his tongue hangin' out. That's how I got the hunch to come up here and wait for you. They was all down at Louie's."

"They? Who?"

"Maxwell and Chuven and them two others. Came in about eight o'clock giving the place the run-over. I was just gettin' ready to blow; me an' Louie'd settled up. I don't work for Louie no more. Aw, that radio got my goat for one thing, squawkin' every minute. And Louie—a fine heel that guy is, givin' you a deal like that. He's the one that put that description in my head of that guy in the corner; I never seen nobody. But he says I did, and I'm working for him, ain't I?"

"I THOUGHT he was mixed up in this!" growled Joe. "I had an idea—well, if he is, he'll tell me who this Martin is! I'll make him! What do I care what happens?" he burst forth suddenly. "They've got me anyway—they'll send me to the chair for something I never did. I might as well deserve it. Oh, I wouldn't even deserve it then, killing men like that!"

"Say!" exclaimed Full-House, half turning to him. "You're hard, ain't you? Listen, kid, I never said Louie was in on nothin', did I? I just said he told me what to testify down at the Bureau. Maybe he seen the guy he was talking about; how do I know?"

"I know!" snapped Joe Barry. "Martin was sitting right there when Louie fired me. He knew who was in that corner!"

"All right." Full-House leaned back. "It ain't no skin off my teeth. I ain't no press agent for Louie. He's done enough to me, ain't he? Always squawkin' about this, squawkin' about that, bawling out a guy. Who the hell does he think he is—Mr. Waldorf? I never thought he run nothing but a dump, anyway."

"You said Chuven and Maxwell came down there to-night?"

"Yeh, and two others with 'em. They gave the dump the run-over and bawled out Louie and me; said they had a hunch we'd cover you up if you came our way. They walked in just as I was walkin' out. I'd just told Louie

what I thought of him for chargin' me three dollars for breakage. Say, all the china in his whole dump ain't worth no three dollars. I don't have to work for no guy," Full-House went on. "I can get all the jobs I want without workin' for no slave driver. Didn't I work private for eight years before I ever seen Louie? I worked for one guy straight for four years; take you right to his joint. Guy named Jamison. He's a big shot in the oil business and heavy in politics down at Washington. Take me back any time I want to work for him. But I don't need to work for nobody. I got a racket of my own. What I mean, I've made up my mind to follow it, now we've teamed up."

Joe paid scant attention.

"Pete Maxwell, did he act down there like he thought I was really a pal of Hymie Fradke's?"

"That's the guy you was celled up with? Yeh, he talked about it—called you a rat. Swell friend that guy is; them kind 'd pinch their poor old grandmother, them kind would. Ain't they dicks? Why shouldn't they slough a guy? So down there, they gets to blowin' off. Swellin' around an' tellin' what they're going to do.

"They say they know you left some dough in your room, plenty jack, and that you'll be back after it. Then they said they had two broad-fins there already and that they was goin' up too, in case you sprung a gat and wanted to trade smoke with 'em. So I gets me an idea. I'm lookin' for a pal—some guy I can trust. Most guys you tie up with these days, you can trust 'em just as far as you can throw the Woolworth Building. You're in a jam; you wouldn't slough nobody that 'd done you a square deal, would you, kid?"

"You know I w o u l d n ' t, Full-House."

"Didn't I just say so? So I see a chance to do you a swell turn and make up for what that rat Louie made me do down at the Bureau and get me a pal all at once. We're pals, ain't we, kid?" Joe felt his clammy hand. "Ain't we pals?"

"If you say so," Joe answered gratefully.

IT was good to have even Full-House for a friend, admitting in that friendship a motive not wholly altruistic. Joe Barry cared little right now. He was a fugitive from justice, charged with double homicide.

"The way I figured," went on Full-House, raising his voice above the clatter of the taxicab as they struck an uneven stretch of road in the Long Island factory district, "me 'n' you, we team up swell. We know each other. We worked together, didn't we? You're game, ain't you? You'd do a little thing or two, wouldn't you, kid, that 'd make plenty jack, even if it did get the cops sore? What's the diff? They'll slip you the Hot Mamma anyway if they knock you down."

Joe Barry shifted, looking out for a moment at the dark shadows of great buildings as they veered from the highway into a side street.

"The way I feel now, I could rob a bank, single-handed. I'd do it, too, if I thought it would get me what I wanted."

"Tough, eh, kid?" asked Full-House with a jocular poke in the side. "Attaboy. I ain't no sweet smelling vi'let myself. Aw, what's the use? Work your head off for some guy and the best you get's the worst of it. I've had this in my head for a couple of years. What I mean, I'm set on it now. Me, I want plenty jack. You got to have it. Plenty jack and lam it out of

bounds. What the hell, this ain't the only country they got places to live in."

Suddenly Full-House veered to questioning. Most of it concerned Hymie Fradke and what that man had said and done. At last Joe cut in.

"What's your racket, Full-House?"

"Nix," answered the other man. The cab halted before an apartment house.

"Get out!" the waiter commanded.

But once the taxicab had been dismissed he did not lead the way to the apartment house. Instead, hustling Joe at his side, he hurried through the darkness of an unfrequented street, at last to veer across a vacant lot and to a small garage behind a dark house.

"Duck in there," he commanded as he unlocked the door. "I'll be back in a minute."

Presently Full-House returned.

"Had to go get a little more jack," he said. "Probably won't need it, but you never know. Maybe we'll have plenty jack by this time to-morrow night. Climb in," he ordered, as he opened the door of the ancient-appearing automobile which occupied the garage. "We've got to lam it!"

Joe obeyed, listening with something of misgiving to the rattling of loose fenders, the clattering of the hood and the spasmodic missing of the engine as Full-House backed out the car and untangled his lean form from the driver's seat that he might close the garage doors. Then he was back again, turning the protesting machine to the street and onward toward better highways.

"WHERE'LL we go?" asked Joe at last. They were coughing their way across the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge again.

"Washington," answered Full-House curtly.

"Will this machine make it all right?"

"Make it?" asked Full-House. "Say! Wait till you get on the open road."

Then his voice took a tone of sudden command:

"We're coming into New York. Slop down in the seat and put your head over this way, against your arm, like you was asleep. To hide your face in case there's a cop on the make. No need him lamping you. Stay that way till we get out of town.

"Huh!" he exclaimed. "Make it to Washington? Two hundred and a quarter miles? Wait till we hit the highway! Now, duck!"

Joe obeyed. Interminable time passed, and distance, conveyed to Barry only by the various noises. But finally Full-House poked him with an elbow.

"All right now, kid," he said.

Joe Barry straightened with the knowledge that much of the noise of the ancient car had ceased. True, the fenders still rattled and the hood clattered, but the protests of the engine had ceased. It was purring smoothly now, with the confidence of power; trees were speeding by, the tires were humming, the night breeze hitting smartly into Joe's hot face. Full-House turned triumphantly.

"I guess she can't go, eh, kid? This baby'll make eighty. Bought it off a bootlegger. Still got his license on it—soft for me if I get in a jam, eh, kid? Got a wire under the dash that shorts half the spark-plugs when a guy's going through town. Bulls don't look for this kind of bus to be haulin' alky. Listen," he asked suddenly, "this guy Fradke, he coughs all he knows to you, eh? All

about how this here Big Friday, or whoever he is, hands him the run-around?"

Joe Barry pulled at his breath.

"Yes, he told me all that."

"Huh." Then: "Why would this here Big Friday have it in for you?"

"How do I know, Full-House?" Fatigue, the drain of nervous concentration had made Barry momentarily testy. "Why should anybody have it in for me? Why should Martin have done the things he did, and Louie—lying against me and making you do the same? I just know, Full-House, that I'm going to get even if it takes the last breath in my body! Some way, I'll find out. And I don't care whether Maxwell's my enemy or not; I'll write to his chief and see if I can't get some action there. Oh, I'll be on the move when I do it," he added as Full-House sneered. "They've put me up for murder," he finished desperately. "All right, they'll have a murderer to deal with!"

Full-House straightened from his bent position over the wheel. His head turned slightly to one side, visible in the light of the dash, a thin, loose jowl protruding over his collar.

"Well, kid," he said at last, "maybe you're right. I wouldn't let no guy pull a slow drop on me and get away with it. I'd set him over, I guess. But you got to have jack to pull a college gag like that. You got to have your fall-dough right in the mitt when you gaff yourself into a trap like that.

"And plenty o' mouthpieces; them kind with five names on the door—you got to have them babies that 'll think up a bughouse defense or slip a hook into the jury-box to hang the verdict with. That ain't no petit larceny stuff; that's a job for these here big electricians that know how to keep a guy from gettin' a shock. You got to have plenty jack for that."

HE veered. "How about you an' me doing a job of prowling?"

"Where's the money in that?" Joe asked caustically.

"Plenty jack where I'd prowl," said Full-House proudly. "I know my lay. Just outside Washington. Big estate stuff; driveways and all that."

"And guards."

"Not this guy—the way guards drink up bonded stuff when you ain't home. He's got telltales. I could kill every wire in five minutes. Didn't I work for him four years? Oughtn't I know something?"

"That's this Jamison you've talked about."

"Lousy with jack," said Full-House meditatively. "I've seen him put twenty grand in that little wall safe behind the big picture in the living room. It's got works like an alarm clock; you could spring it with a can opener."

"And where's he?"

Full-House grinned.

"Now I suppose he's sitting right there in his carpet slippers with a shotgun over his knees, waiting for us. Say, he's down in Florida, and the old woman and the brat with him. Didn't I say I worked for him four years? What do you think I've been writing him letters ever since, telling him how happy I was with him. To make a collection? I didn't see him leave grand after grand in that matchbox for nothing."

"Then—"

"Kid," asked Full-House coldly, "do you think I risked myself a jolt in stir to-night as an accessory after the fact, just to give you a free ride? Think it over."

Miles passed in which Joe Barry

strove to orientate his mind to the swiftness of happenings. Prison, escape, danger, escape again, a friend who had helped him, and now that friend was talking of burglary as though it were a perfectly natural thing.

Burglary! The name did not sound good.

At last Full-House began to talk again.

"This ain't no second story job we're pulling," he insisted. "There ain't going to be no squawking old dames to wake up and prod some guy into chasing us with a poker. There ain't no dogs, no cops. We just walk in, light up the dump, make ourselves at home, and take our time."

"Walk in?"

"Just the same. Them windows jimmy easy. It's an old joint."

"But you said there were alarms."

"Yeh, and I said I could deado 'em in five minutes, didn't I? What more do you want, with fifty acres around you? Say, listen!" Full-House snapped finally, "get your damn' head to working. We need plenty jack. What do you want to do? Roam around the country and have to end up in some flophouse when our jack runs out? This ain't no tourist trip. Fine chance we'd have in a flophouse, where the cops give you the run-over every hour. How long would you last in a dump like that? Where'll you get? I'll tell you where you'll get! Watchin' 'em slit your pants-legs for the electrodes."

JOE pounded a fist into his open palm.

"I don't know, Full-House."

"You don't know? You're wanting jack, ain't you? What I mean, you've got to have it."

"Yes, but I've been thinking about something. Suppose we did rob that house. Suppose I got all the money I wanted and went through with everything that keeps pounding in my mind. I wouldn't be committing a crime in my own conscience if I fought back against men that have tried to send me to the chair. But what's this Jamison ever done to me? Why should I go in there and rob his house—take everything he's got?"

Full-House merely laughed.

"What we'll take wouldn't even last him for one good drunk. Didn't I tell you he was lousy with jack?"

Joe still demurred.

"Can that stuff," snapped Full-House. "I know. I know you're going to help me. What the hell, don't you owe me nothing? Where'd you be now if I hadn't flagged you to-night? Suppose I'd let you—"

"You had your own plans, Full-House."

"Well, suppose I did," the man said. "Suppose I come down there just to get you to help me pull a job. Does that change it any? Would that make it any sweeter for you if they was a death watch, stamping out your time-sheet up at The College? I guess them guys would wreck the Stinging Lizzie, just if you asked them."

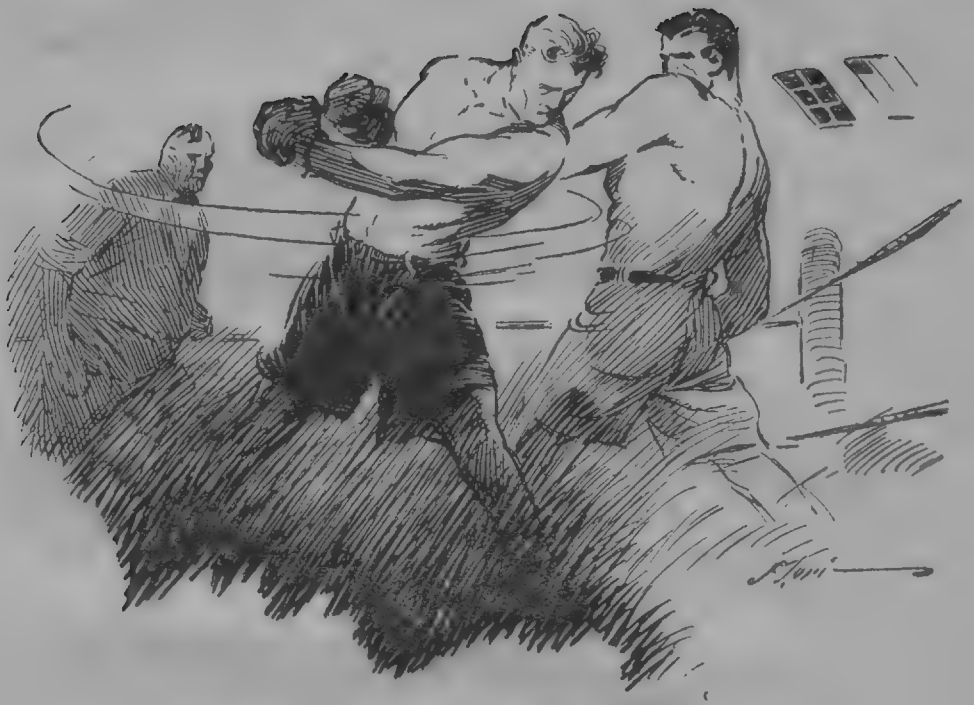
Joe Barry shook his head; this man could draw ghoulish pictures.

Full-House went on:

"I guess I never done nothing, keeping you under cover and getting you out of town. Suppose they'd clamped down on us, while we were making the get-away? I guess they'd have turned me loose!"

"Never mind the rest, Full-House," said Joe huskily. "I'll go through with you."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Jimmy missed by the distance from New York to California

"Nice and Quiet"

Jimmy Borden thought he'd quit the fight racket—but the peaceful profession he chose made the ring look like a sewing circle

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

THE bell! It's the openin' of the sixth. Somethin's wrong with Jimmy Borden.

He rushes, feints with his right, sends over a fast left, misses, snaps another left out, misses again and catches a terrific wallop on the button from Marty O'Rourke. It's a clout he should of sidestepped.

The smack jolts him. He don't seem to be judgin' distances correct. He takes another slam on the kisser and goes bicycle ridin' till his head clears.

Jimmy tries in-fightin' and tosses a flock of stiff short jabs into Marty's biscuit basket. Marty don't like it. He's tender in the tummy. He starts to back away, changes his mind and clinches.

The referee separates the pair of them. Jimmy steps back, then in, heavin' a beaut straight for Marty's jaw, which he misses by the distance from New York to California.

The crowd boos. They're givin' the Bronx cheer to the kid who had been their idol when he entered the ring. They want to know why he don't knock O'Rourke cold. They figure Jimmy is stallin', missin' them easy punches, and they know from havin' paid admission

to previous performances that Borden's steel-muscled arms are accustomed to accuracy.

I don't know what's wrong no more than the cash customers. But I'm sure it ain't Jimmy's fault. I handled Borden since he first broke into the fight game. When I added him to my string of glove throwers he was just a youngster with big brown eyes, close-cropped blond hair that stood back from his forehead in a soft wave, and a friendly smile for everybody. Only he packed a wallop that would of made a pile-driver ashamed of itself, and he was lightnin' fast on his feet.

He was managin' a chain grocery store in Montclair, New Jersey, then, and I brought him along till he was within grabbin' reach of the welter-weight crown and one of the most popular fighters that ever tossed a glove. Moreover, he was straight.

We're about set to take on the champ himself and have already laid down our first barrage of ballyhooey for the newspaper scribes when this bout with O'Rourke looms up.

THE bout didn't look as if it would interfere with our plans none. O'Rourke is just an inflated stumble-bum from the New Orleans water front. He's a slugger and he looks tough. When he fights he snarls like a mad baboon which has got him a reputation in the small towns where he's been takin' over a bunch of second-raters and has-beens. But whether he knocks 'em out or scares 'em silly with his pan, his managers don't divulge.

Anyhow, when the bout is arranged with Jimmy, the ape naturally gets played up a lot better than he is. The wise boys don't tumble. As usual they slap their money down on Borden and I don't think nothin' of this angle of the fracas until I get tipped off just before the show starts that "Nails" Conroy, the million-dollar racketeer with Fifth Avenue headquarters, is coverin' all the Borden bets he can lay his hands on. Henchmen of his are also coverin' the favorite's money for him in distant metropolises like Detroit, Pittsburgh and *et cetera*, which don't smell like crushed strawberries.

I know Conroy. He's a sure-thing gambler.

Still I know he can't get to Jimmy for a fix. Jimmy'd haul off and paste him on the nose, even if he does own most of the Arena. And he ain't been to call on me, which would of done him no good, either.

The odds are pretty long. Maybe Conroy's playin' a hunch, I say to myself.

There is a big mob turns out for the fight. It's been played up by the papers as Jimmy's last public appearance in the squared circle before he goes after the champ.

Everybody's happy for the first three rounds.

Jimmy's in swell form. He plays all around Marty like a fire hose on a five-dollar blaze and the wharf rat spends most of his time coverin' up and growlin' as if he'd been born in a zoo.

What a sap I was to worry! That's what I'm thinkin' right along until the openin' of the fourth. O'Rourke steps out with a new gleam in his beady green eyes and more confidence in his feet. He seems to be expectin' somethin' will happen.

And he's right. Jimmy starts to crumble mysteriously. He's fightin' harder than he ever done, but he ain't landin' any of his smacks on his opponent.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" I

says after the sixth. Jimmy is sittin' on the stool in his corner with his arms restin' over the ropes while he's gettin' sponged off. "Grab hold of yourself, boy. Stop kiddin' that monkey. Smack him for a loop this time and let's go home."

"I'm tryin' to, ain't I?" snaps Borden peevishly.

Before I can find out what's eatin' him the gong rings and Jimmy steps into the center. He's worse in the seventh and when I try to talk to him after the stanza is over he tells me to shut up and I can't get another word out of him.

IT'S a massacre from the eighth on, but Jimmy sticks it out the stipulated number of rounds. Grit and fightin' stamina and nothin' else kept him on his feet. Cut, bloody, one eye swellin' like a baked potato, and bruised to a mass of pulp, he lies out on the table in the dressin' room after the fight is over and groans while the rubbers work on him.

Marty got the fight and the money on a decision.

"You dirty double-crosser," Jimmy barks when he sees me bendin' over him. "You done it, and you know what you done, too. I hope you got plenty of jack out of it, because when I get up I'm goin' to slam you within an inch of your life."

"Done what?" I says, figurin' he's gone loco from the punch punishment he had took.

"You know what," goes on Jimmy. "When they sponged me off after the third round there was somethin' in that sponge. It made my eyes smart. I couldn't see straight after that, couldn't get my distances right. That's why I was missin' my punches and steppin' into Marty's. Yah! I suppose you didn't sell me out, did you? And you know fine I can't do nothin'. If I holler to the press they'll say it's a loser's squawk and give me the razz for bein' a bum sport. What a fine mug you guys made out of me tonight!"

"Wait a minute, Jimmy," I says. "Let me get this. First, who sponged you off after the third, can you remember?"

"Mike Finn," he says. "Now get out of here before I bust you on the nose."

I went out. But I was lookin' for Mike Finn. He's gone. Left the buildin' early, says somebody that seen him go. From another party I find out that he left with a bird named Nelson, who is one of Nails Conroy's payoff men. That clinched it.

I went back into the dressin' room and tried to convince Jimmy that I was as innocent of the frame as he was, and twice as big a sap for trustin' Finn. He used to work for Conroy a long while ago.

"Well, anyhow," says Jimmy after I've got him calmed down, "it don't make much difference. I'm through with the game. I told you I promised myself the first time I got mixed in anything dirty I was quittin'. I meant it then, Dan Webster, and I mean it now. I'm off the whole bunch of you. It's a rotten business; you double-crossed me, and I'm through."

"Listen," I says. "There's skunks in Wall Street ridin' in limousines, but they ain't all crooks. Conroy was probably only figurin' on what a money-maker and drawin' card a return bout with Marty would be. It 'll fill in the time between now and when you meet the champ."

"Yeah? Well, I ain't meetin' any champ, or makin' any money for a

lousy racketeer no more. Good night, Mr. Webster. Pleased to of metcha."

NEXT day I went around to see Jimmy again, but it was no use. Not only was his mind as made up as the night previous, but his girl friend backed his decision. What chance has a guy against a combination like that? Just the same as an ice-box salesman talkin' to Eskimos.

Nails Conroy raised his eyebrows when I barged into his office and spread out my grievance.

"My, my," he says, "what a temperamental young man! And as for that other, I'm sure I don't know a thing about it. And if I were you I wouldn't drink so heavily in the mornings. It 'll undermine your constitution, Mr. Webster."

With that he excuses me on the grounds that his grandma ain't feelin' well and he wants to send her a bunch of spinach. I can hear him laughin' as I walk out.

The next time I go around to talk sense into Jimmy he's checked out of his hotel and didn't leave no forwardin' address.

Fine, huh? Great stuff! That's the way it is in this fight racket. If it ain't one item, it's somethin' else.

After two weeks I quit lookin' for Jimmy and I can't say that there was any sorrow in my eyes the mornin' I pick up a newspaper and see in headlines across the front page where Nails Conroy has got his.

It appears he was dinin' out in a ritzy road house in Westchester when two guys come in in evenin' clothes, ask the head waiter if Mr. Conroy is there, and if so, where? The head waiter points to where Nails is sittin' at a table with a swell-lookin' jane, and one of the guys says, "Thanks, we've got an important message for him," and hands the head waiter a five-dollar tip.

Nails, accordin' to the daily prints, is so busy with his company that he don't notice the visitors till they're at his table.

"Good evenin', Mr. Conroy," says one of the guys. Then he turns to the girl and tells her he's sorry they have to spoil her dinner, but business is business and here goes.

With that they both draw iron. Conroy has twelve slugs in him from the heavy caliber automatics when they pick him up off the floor. The killers beat it in the excitement and before any one thinks about the dame she has dived for the door and taken it on the lam in Conroy's car, which was later found abandoned in the Bronx.

What a sweet mess! I'm wonderin' if Jimmy has seen the swell obituary Conroy is gettin' and am just goin' to cross Broadway when a guy in a speedin' blue, stream-lined roadster all but runs me down.

"Why don't you look where you're goin', Fatso?" yells the guy behind the wheel.

It's Jimmy Borden. He recognizes me and pulls into the curb.

"Hello, Jimmy Borden," I says, steppin' up to meet him. "I see in the papers where Conroy—"

"Ssssh!" Jimmy puts a finger over his lips. "I'm Jimmy Gordon now," he says. "Hop in and I'll tell you somethin'."

I climb into the car and we bounce off with a quick jerk before I even get seated. It's a block and a half before I get my wind back again.

"What are you doin' besides reckless drivin'?" I ask Jimmy. He looks in the pink and well-dressed.

"Workin' for a newspaper."

"Huh?" I says. "For cryin' into tin hats! Who taught you how to write?"

"Don't be dumb," says Jimmy. "I work for a tabloid. Get pictures and things. You know, off walls or wherever they've got 'em. And I phone my stuff in. Some guy in the office writes it. It's a clean business. Nice and quiet."

"YEAH," I says. "I guess maybe it is. Where are you goin' now?"

"To Conroy's house. That's why I thought you might like to come along. The office got a hot tip that he's got a picture in his bedroom of the jane he was dinin' with last night when he got the works. It's a scoop if I get it first."

"Ahead of the other reporters, huh?"

"Sure, ahead of them and the cops both. We gotta hurry."

"Still goin' with the same girl?" I ask Jimmy after a while. "And is she still workin' in the 'Divinities'?"

"Yep," says Jimmy, smilin'. "Florence Holt. She's a peach of a fine kid. She's got a speakin' part now and when I get the hundred-buck bonus I'm goin' to collect for grabbin' off this picture I'll have enough to buy the ring we've got all picked out. We're goin' to get married soon."

"Yeah?" I says, sorry I had brought up the subject. I can see by the dreamy look that slips into his eyes that he's crazier'n ever about the girl. His mind ain't strictly on what he's doin', either. We miss an elevated pillar by half an inch and squeeze ahead of a truck against a red light by a hair-raisin' margin.

I had figured that maybe if Jimmy had had an argument with the frail or somethin' I could coax him back into the fight game. It hurt to see him so happy in his new line.

We swing onto Fifth Avenue and pull up before a small but high-hat lookin' place.

"This is where Conroy lived," says Jimmy. "Get out and come with me."

He glanced around. There's a guy that's probably workin' on another sheet walkin' away and a cop in uniform standin' in front of the door. He blocks Jimmy's progress.

"Who did you want to see?" says the copper. "You can't get in there."

"Be careful who you're talkin' to, Flatty," snaps Jimmy. "We're from the D. A.'s office."

He grabs me by the arm and we brush past.

Jimmy rings the silver-plated doorbell and a bird that looks like a broken-down race track tout that I've seen somewhere before answers the summons. He's the butler, and he greets us cold as the frosting on a stale cake.

We walk inside.

"D. A.'s office," barks Jimmy. "Where is Mr. Conroy's bedroom? We want somethin'."

While we're followin' the butler upstairs I whisper to Jimmy: "I thought you worked for a newspaper."

"Shut up, you sap," says Jimmy. "I do. I'm just showin' you how pictures is gotten. We have to get what we came for, don't we?"

Nails Conroy sure had a nice bedroom. Jimmy takes in the whole place quickly and I notice he's disappointed because there ain't no picture there.

"Has anybody been here yet—from headquarters?" he asks the butler quickly. The guy says, "No, sir."

Jimmy comes over to me. "Talk to this bird out in the hall while I look around, will you?" he says.

The butler and me go into a two-man huddle outside, me tellin' him what a fine fellow Mr. Conroy was and more boloney of the same ilk. I'm posted where I can see into the bedroom and I can watch Jimmy goin' through the bureau drawers and turnin' everythin' inside out like a practiced second-story worker. He's quick, too, and he seems excited as he rushes out.

"Come on," he says. "Snappy now. Let's beat it and never mind sayin' 'Good-by' to that egg."

WE run down the stairs together and out the door. The butler comes after us.

Outside there's about four or five guys with paper and pencil in their hands and they're talkin' to three guys whom I recognize at once. They're Mike Finn, Nelson, and Marty O'Rourke. Jimmy spots 'em, too, and he draws a deep breath.

"Why can't we get in and look around?" chirps one of the newspaper boys. "He got in." The guy points to Jimmy.

"Sure," pipes another opposition representative. "He got in and you oughta search that little fat gink with him for a camera. He was probably takin' pictures."

Me, I never took a picture in my life, with or without a camera, but the trio ain't botherin' with me. All three makes a dive for Jimmy.

I've seen fast fightin' but I never seen a right shoot out with the speed Jimmy put behind his first drive. It took Finn smack on the button and stretched him with a skull-crackin' thump on the pavement.

Jimmy must have recognized Marty next, for instead of beatin' it for his car he goes berserk. Marty catches a one-two to the chin, a brace of beautiful swift uppercuts and reels back with a yell. When he steps forward again with his dukes up and his chin held in, Jimmy slams him sideways on the ear.

Nelson reaches in his hip pocket and my heart goes half out of my mouth. I figure he's divin' for a rod but he pulls out a blackjack and starts toward Jimmy.

The rest of the press has stepped out of the range of trouble and seems to be enjoyin' the party from the sidelines and the cop is holdin' his club over his head threatenin' to bring it down on the first dome within reach, which happens to be mine. Trust a cop to grab an innocent bystander.

"Jimmy!" I yell as I sideslip the wallop from the cop's stick. "Look out for that baby with the billy."

Jimmy's watchin' him, though, and his fist crashes square into Nelson's mouth. The blow sends Nelson sprawlin' and he sits on the sidewalk howlin' like a spanked kid and spittin' blood and teeth all over the block.

"Run for the car, Dan," shouts Jimmy. "Get it started. I'll be right with you."

I don't need no second invitation. The cop is after me again. I get the car started and Jimmy, cool as a night in December but almost tremblin' with rage, stays to paste Marty two more cracks before he leaps for the runnin' board.

We move off with a jump that would of cleared a five-foot fence and swing east at the first corner. The cop is blowin' his whistle for the reserves or somethin' and, what's worse, the last backward glimpse I get of the recent scene of battle, Marty has hailed a cab and him and his companions are climbin' into it.

"They're goin' to chase us," I says to Jimmy, who suddenly looks very solemn and gloomy.

"Let 'em," snaps Jimmy. "Here, give me the wheel."

He grabs the wheel and scrambles over while I slip out from under and the car is hummin' like a bullet toward Third Avenue.

"You watch 'em and tell me when we've lost 'em," says Jimmy takin' a corner on two wheels.

We turn and twist and get mixed up in the traffic but the cab driver is good. He's still followin' us as we mount the ramp of the Fifty-ninth Street bridge and head across the East River toward Long Island. We go clear out to Flushing before Jimmy is convinced we've ditched the pursuit squadron.

JIMMY looks white. His eyes have an unseein', glassy stare in them and his mouth suddenly sets grim as a prison gate.

"Let's stop and have a cup o' coffee," he suggests, pullin' up with a jolt in front of a cafeteria.

"What's the matter, kid?" I says, when we're sittin' down inside. "Didn't you get the picture?"

"I got it all right," replies Jimmy.

He reaches under his tightly buttoned vest and slips out a portrait photograph. The picture is bent and broken at the corners from the recent fray but the face is intact and from the brief slant that I get at it, the dame is sure a knock-out.

The next minute Jimmy deliberately tears the picture into small pieces. His face is gray as death. He looks as if he's thrustin' a knife into his heart and twistin' it to make it hurt more.

"That's Florence Holt's picture," he says quietly. "My girl."

He throws the pieces on the floor, steps on them and orders another mug of Java.

"And—that's that," he adds, gulpin' miserably.

"Yeah," I says, "women and horses is two things a guy should never ought to bet on."

"Shut up," says Jimmy. "What do you know about it? Gee, Dan, I loved that kid. I'd of died for her, honest I would."

Then he just sits there gazin' and gazin' at the glass top of the table in front of him. I sneak over to the counter and get him some coffee but when I put it down in front of him he don't even seem to notice it.

Finally when I'm thinkin' that maybe a nice piece of coconut custard pie or a chocolate éclair will bring him to, he snaps out of it himself.

"Got a dime?" he says. "I guess I'd better phone the office."

He walks toward the telephone booth as if he was wearin' a pair of lead-soled diver's shoes or goin' to his own funeral. He don't stay away long. When he comes back he slumps into his chair again.

"Well," he says, "I had the city desk on the wire and I told them I didn't get the picture and the guy asked me if I had any idea where they might pick up the girl herself, if I had any tip on her. So I said sure, to send a couple of men up to Earl Farrell's theater where Farrell was holdin' a call for chorines for his new show. 'You'll find her there,' I said."

"Jimmy," I says. "You shouldn't of done that."

"Why not?" he snaps at me. "That's the only place I'm dead certain she won't be. Flo's got a job."

"Oh," I says.

"Yeah," goes on Jimmy slowly,

"and I guess that lets me out of the newspaper racket, too. I might as well quit before I'm fired. That's the lowest thing a guy can do, put his own feelin's ahead of his sheet. It ain't done on a paper, Dan."

Then we sit some more and neither of us says anythin'. The silence gets so thick you could cut it with a butter knife. It's a tough day for Jimmy, all right.

"Dan," he bursts out suddenly, "I'd like to see a good prize fight to-night. I want to see somebody get smacked on the smeller."

"Boy," I says, slappin' him on the shoulder, "now you're talkin' a man's language."

WE discuss fights and fighters for a while and I remind Jimmy that O'Rourke is the feature on a good card scheduled to be pulled off at the Coney Island stadium that night, and that if Jimmy wants to see what Marty looks like after the cauliflower ear he had gave him earlier in the day, I know a bird in the box office who will fix us up with a pair of Annie Oakleys.

"Swell," says Jimmy. "Who's the lucky stiff that's goin' to mix mitts with the tramp?"

"Another ham-fatter," I says, "Bennie Hudski, the Polack."

"Yeah?" says Jimmy. "Call up your friend."

In a couple of minutes I have the stadium on the wire and am askin' for my friend in the box office.

"Sure, I'll save you a pair, ringside," says this friend of mine, "but it don't look like the main bout'll go on to-night. McFarley, the matchmaker, was around cursin' and sayin' that the Polack is scared of bein' mixed up in this Conroy shootin' and he blew the town for parts unknown. He had a big quarrel with Nails about three months ago and the cops want to ask him some questions, I guess."

I'm about to break the bad news to Jimmy when I get a sudden flash of activity in the mental department and I dive back into the phone booth. I call up the stadium again. This time its McFarley I want to talk to. I spill my stuff into his ear and he says that it's aces with him if we can work it.

"Jimmy," I says when I get back to the table, "how about takin' on Marty O'Rourke yourself to-night?"

I tell him about Bennie Hudski blowin' the city.

Jimmy just shakes his head.

"No," he says. "What's the use? I'm out of the game now. The fans got me figured for a quitter, anyhow."

"They won't if you paste Marty all over the lot to-night," I says. "We can drive back to New York and get you weighed in at the Boxin' Commissioners' office. McFarley will meet us there. He can get the Commish to okay the bout. They'll eat out of his hand. Your license ain't expired yet. Everythin' will be roses, Jimmy. Say you will, won't you, kid?"

I keep on talkin' like I was peddlin' insurance. Jimmy weakens gradually. The way he's feelin' deep inside himself on account of the picture incident, I figure he could lick his weight in wildcats. Havin' a guy he hates like he hates Marty against him will be duck soup.

"All right," says Jimmy reluctantly. The old sparkle is comin' back into his brown eyes. "But how about Marty?"

"Marty'll do what he's told. Don't worry about him," I says, addin', "he thinks he licked you once anyhow, you know."

"He does, does he?" Jimmy

slammed his fist on the table. "The dirty mug. Let's go."

Before we leave I call up McFarley and tell him to meet us in New York.

There's a bunch of sports writers in the Boxin' Commission's office when we get there. I notice Jimmy takes one of them aside and holds a whispered conference. When he comes back he's smilin'.

"That was Harry Edmonds I was talkin' to," he says. "He recognized me from seein' me in the office but he's a good skate. I asked him not to say anythin' about me bein' Jimmy Gordon, the reporter on his paper, or nothin'. He says he'll keep it under his hat and anyhow it ain't important, that the main thing is Jimmy Borden returnin' to the ring to mingle fisticuffs with Marty O'Rourke."

"Sure," I says, "that's the main thing."

THE late editions of the afternoon papers come out with a lot of stuff about the unexpected last-minute switch in the fight card at the Coney Island stadium and they print the fact that the managers of the stadium announce that any of the customers who had bought tickets early for the O'Rourke-Hudski clash and feels that the new line-up don't suit them that all they has to do is present their tickets to the box office and their dough will be promptly and cheerfully refunded.

Long before the first preliminary is scheduled to go on there's a line a mile long down at the stadium. But they aren't turnin' tickets in. They're tryin' to buy seats.

The speculators is sore, too, because they didn't load up heavily on pasteboards for the O'Rourke-Hudski fight. Those that had a few cleaned up on them. When the first brace of prelim lads open up on each other, the house is S. R. O.

Back in the dressing rooms I'm havin' a long talk with Jimmy. I don't mention women once, either. It ain't necessary. I'm just tellin' him that Marty has improved a lot lately and that he's got a straight left that's poison but the tip-off on it is a slight drop of the right shoulder just before he shoots that left forward.

"Marty's developed a mean right jab, too," I warn Jimmy and I notice with enjoyment that he's gettin' madder and madder the better I tell him Marty is.

This is goin' to be a fight that'll have the crowd puttin' their fists through each other's hats.

"At that," says Jimmy, suddenly lookin' around, "it feels nice to get back again and smell the sweat and the alcohol and see the guys hangin' around in bright tights and funny-lookin' dressin' robes, waitin' to knock somebody for a loop or get knocked themselves. It's a great game, ain't it?"

Two seconds later he draws my head down close to him. "Listen, Dan," he says, "you sponge me off this time, will you? I ain't takin' any chances."

"Sure," I says, "and you better get your hands taped. We haven't much more time."

When Jimmy steps under the glare of the cluster lights and the driftin' blue haze from a million bum cigars, he gets a mixed greetin'. Some of the mob cheers and yells that they're glad he's back and the other half hollers "quitter" at him and showers him with catcalls. They hurt, too. I can see Jimmy wince under them and his eyes grow hard as agates.

Marty comes in confident and

makin' faces like a mad hyena about to devour a rabbit. He gets a pretty good hand. He's a good actor and after the bell has sounded he opens up with one of his wild rushes.

Jimmy's out of practice but his head is workin'. He don't have time to sidestep the onslaught so he closes up in a clinch. He gets a royal razz for it, too, but he don't care. His one idea is to slam Marty for the count.

When the referee breaks them, Jimmy measures off for a haymaker. Marty blocks it and draws first blood, plantin' a right that cuts Jimmy under the left eye. Jimmy tightens up his defense, and Marty, growin' too eager, moves forward with a growl to sling a left at Jimmy's chin.

Jimmy jerks his head the fraction of an inch necessary to have the blow shoot past him and his own left catches Marty on his sneerin' lips. Marty goes down like an upset apple cart.

The referee kicks a couple of Marty's teeth out of the way so's he won't skid on them lyin' on the mat, and starts the count.

MARTY ain't even got sense enough to take his rest period. He gets up ragin' and starts after Jimmy like a wild bull. Jimmy's gettin' better. The old skill is comin' back. He times a pretty shot that smacks Marty's sore ear.

Marty shakes his head with the pain and mutters curses under his breath, but he keeps his feet. He's coverin' up, stallin' for time, though, when the bell rings.

"How do you feel, kid?" I says as Jimmy flops easily on the stool and rinses his mouth out with water.

"Great!" says Jimmy. "Wipe that left eye gently, will ya? It hurts. I'm goin' to get him for that."

"I told you Marty was good," says I, turnin' away so's he won't see me smilin'.

"Oh, yeah!" says Jimmy. "Him and who else?"

The second round is the bloodiest slugfest I've ever seen committed in a career devoted to the knights of the squared circle. The customers got the fever and start pokin' each other in the ribs and swingin' their arms explainin' to themselves how Jimmy landed this clout and Marty put over that smack.

Both men are battlin' like unchained fury and I'm surprised to see that what I've been tellin' Jimmy ain't so much boloney as I thought it was. Marty has improved his fightin' style one whole hell of a lot since he come North.

There's two knock-downs that inning. Both of them bring the crowd to its feet with a yell. Marty catches Jimmy off balance and smacks him on the jaw. The wallop topples him over.

Later Jimmy drives a vicious right through a low guard of Marty's that lifts the ape clear off his feet. Both men get up on these bedtime occasions before the counts gets dangerously high.

At the close of the sock-swappin' second round, Jimmy drops breathlessly onto his chair. His heart is thumpin' like a trip-hammer.

"Take it easy," I warn him. "Remember, kid, you ain't been trainin'. Save your wind."

Jimmy hands me a dirty look and I'm scared that when he goes back into the ring he's goin' to burst forth with another windmill demonstration, which is just what he does. All my hollerin' from the sidelines don't slow him up, either.

Marty, havin' learned to take advice, takes the round easy, dancin' out of

Jimmy's way most of the time or leanin' on him in the clinches. He's savin' his stuff for later.

It's evident from the way Jimmy is rippin' into things that he won't last long. No human bein' could stand that pace. But Jimmy's got his mind made up concernin' what he has to do.

About the middle of the round there's a split second when Marty ain't watchin' his step closely. The crowd notices it. So does Jimmy and he lands on O'Rourke swift as a hawk. You can hear people drawin' their breath in. Marty's seconds let out a warnin' whoop. They're too late.

The left that laid Marty on his back came so fast you couldn't follow it. The sudden glint of triumph in Jimmy's eyes, the start of the long punch and two smacks was all anythin' but a slow motion picture camera could of got of that clout.

It was beautifully timed, perfect. Marty's jaw and Jimmy's fist were in the same place at the same time just when the latter was travelin' fastest. That was the first smack the spectators heard. The other was when Marty went down like a poled ox, pop-eyed and with a silly meaningless grin on his face.

One look at Marty and the referee knows there's no sense countin', but he goes through the motions just the same.

"Eight—nine—ten," he bellows.

Marty don't even twitch an eyelid.

"Jimmy Borden! The winnah!" yells the referee, hoistin' Jimmy's arm over his head.

JIMMY bolts for his dressing room, ducking the storm of congratulations, the press and everybody.

"You talk to them, Dan," he says, and I could see the let-down had come. "Tell them anything you want. I feel like hell."

The stadium is pretty near deserted when Jimmy and me leave.

"Anyhow," says Jimmy, "the paper won't have a picture of Flo on the front page in the mornin'. But I gotta go back to the office and tell them I've quit before I sign the new contract with you."

"Suit yourself, kid," I says, "but I bet the paper comes out every day just the same."

"Come with me," says Jimmy. "It won't take long."

We drive in to the office of the *Argus* and on the second floor there's a glass door that says, "Editorial Dept. Private. No Admittance. Keep out. This Means You."

Jimmy opens the door and walks in, I trail in after him.

We go through the city room to another glass door that don't say nothin' on it. Jimmy stops.

"Is the chief in?" he asks a little guy measurin' newspaper columns with a long metal ruler as if he didn't know the size of his own paper though I bet he worked there long enough.

The guy looks at Jimmy, gets up and raps reverently on the door like it was the front entrance to the White House. Then he steps inside.

"Send him in," barks a gruff voice from the interior.

Jimmy and I walk in. The chief is sittin' at a mahogany desk smokin' a big cigar.

"It's about time you showed up," barks the managin' editor. "That was a good tip about the girl bein' at the Farrell Theater. We beat the town on findin' her and on pictures, too. She'd been livin' with Conroy and her name was Gloria Munday. She used to be in the chorus of the 'Divinities' but

she got canned two weeks ago and was lookin' for another job."

"Gloria Munday!" Jimmy gasps.

"Gloria Munday," repeats the chief testily. "And I guess you're in for a raise if you want to stay in the newspaper game, Mr.—er—Jimmy Borden."

"Gee! Wait a minute; I gotta call up somebody quick," says Jimmy and he beats it.

When he comes back he's grinnin' and for a minute I'm nervous, figurin' that maybe he'll change his mind and go back to picture grabbin' so the public may have its murders illustrated.

"Harry Edmonds told me who you were, to-night," says the chief. "I had suspected it for some time."

"Yeah?" said Jimmy. "Well, it don't matter, anyhow. I'm Jimmy Borden from now on." He turns to me. "Come on, Dan."

I wait until we're out in the street.

"The picture?" I says.

"It was Flo's, all right," says Jimmy. "I just called her up and asked her who did she know by the name of Gloria Munday and she says Gloria used to work in the show and Flo gave her one of her pictures in exchange for one of Gloria's a long time ago, and now Flo was scared that if the cops or reporters found her picture with Gloria's things they'd mix her up in the Conroy shootin' and—"

"Wait a minute," I says. "Come up for air."

Jimmy repeats it, slower this time.

"And so I told her I was goin' back into the fight racket after I told her I'd got her picture and tore it up, and she says to go ahead and to ask you will you be my best man when we go down to the Municipal Buildin' to-morrow."

"Jimmy," I says, "when that contract is signed I'll do anythin' for you whether I think you deserve it or not."

Who killed Conroy? Ask the district attorney's office. They're still investigatin' and they ain't arrested anybody yet.

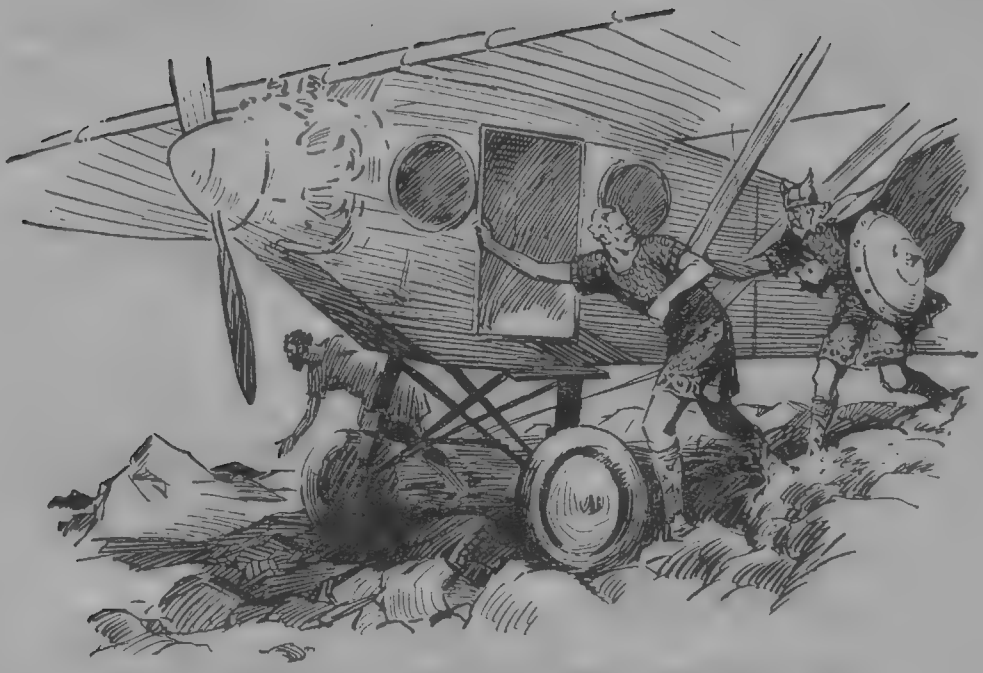
THE END.

A Stamp Worth All the Gold in the World

THAT does not sound very reasonable, but it is true. It is pretty generally known that the post-war monetary inflation in various of the warring European nations went to extremes, but outside of stamp collecting circles few are aware that during 1923 Germany issued a stamp with an imprinted face value of the trifling sum of fifty billion marks. This, in American money at the former par value of the mark, would amount to approximately twelve and a half billion dollars, which represents more than the entire gold supply of the world.

Stamps were issued in denominations of hundreds of thousands of marks and other ridiculously high values. During that year, when the mark was tobogganing, Germany issued one hundred and twenty-six varieties of postage stamps with a total face value of over 238,000,000,000 marks, or about sixty billion dollars, and each one of those denominations was issued in hundreds of thousands of copies. The total (face) value of the issue was—well, figure it out for yourself.

Arthur Stanton.



It was a fearful task to push the plane across that infernal valley

The Radio Gun-Runners

Vikings and winged reptiles, mammoths and coal-age saurians people the strange continent inside the hollow earth; but its chance explorers push on, to a madder adventure still

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Planet," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIMMY LEFAVOUR, best known as Scarface Boston Jimmy, and his crew of gun-runners hijack Tom Jones's yacht Miami, off Newfoundland. But they are carried by storm into the polar ice and over the edge of the world. For they find that the story of the Radio Flyers, who claimed there was no north pole, is true; they sail over the rim of the great north hole opening, and so inside the earth, which is a hollow shell with a central sun.

Here they find a continent inhabited by prehistoric beasts, and fought over by Vikings and the Eskimo-like natives, the Skraelings.

Scarface's lieutenant, Nick Fratelli, seizes the Miami and joins the crippled Skraeling chief Altoonah. After many adventures Scarface is marooned in a strange land of tree-ferns and coal age reptiles. With him are Theresa Ferreira, tomboy daughter of the late captain of the Miami; Helga Redmond,

This story began in the Argosy for February 22.

Viking wife of one of the Radio Flyers who are *yarls* (earls) of the Vikings; Nils Uppri, boy bishop and ruler of the Vikings; and Borghild Hoglund, cousin of the wife of Angus Selkirk, the other Radio Flyer.

The castaways are trapped inside a hastily built stockade by a "flock" of ten-foot reptilian "hens"—weird creatures shaped like fowls, with deadly spurs and short claws on their wing-like arms. Hopelessly besieged in this unknown land, Scarface and Borghild marry; but Theresa temporizes with the eager Nils.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESCUE.

THE discouraging failure of their sortie against the creatures outside the stockade had plunged them all into hopeless melancholy. Scarface was glancing grimly at his useless "rod," when Terry burst out:

"Mr. Jimmy, listen!"

They could all hear a distant hum, as if of a motor.

"An airplane?" asked Terry, using the Viking word *skwaa* which had been applied to the plane in which the Radio Flyers had entered this world.

"No, my Eric's *skwaa* is out of 'gas'," said Helga.

"Couldn't be the Miami, either," Jimmy pointed out. "They're out of gas, too."

Steadily the sound grew in volume.

"It *is* a plane!" shouted Scarface. "I can see it. Quick, smudge the fire, and attract its attention!"

But unluckily, the fire had all been used up in their fight with the reptiles, and not a spark remained. By the time that a new fire could be started, the airship would have passed by.

All five looked frantically around the inclosure for an idea.

"I have it!" shouted Scarface. "Heliograph!"

And he snatched Helga's bark mirror, and reflected the sunlight back up at the approaching craft. It was a chancy business; but finally he caught the pilot's attention. The plane circled, and began to descend.

"Saved! Saved!" they cried, embracing each other.

Yet how did they know that these flyers were friends? They were soon to find out.

There was room enough in the clearing, at the top of the knoll where stood their fort, for the plane to land, so it swooped, took the ground on its wheels—being equipped with wheels, skis and pontoons—and taxied almost to their very door. The great fowl-like reptiles scattered with fright at the roar of the motor, and the besieged party crowded onto the platform of the palisade.

From the plane disembarked two stalwart bearded Vikings in chain-mail and winged helmets. Helga gave one look at them, then opened the gate of the fortress and rushed out.

"Eric, my Eric," she sobbed, flinging herself into the arms of one of the aviators, "I knew you would come. I knew you would come."

The other Viking grinned.

"Hello, folks," said he in English.

It was Tom Jones, strangely metamorphosed.

"Gee, Mr. Jones," exclaimed Theresa. "I'd hardly of known you with your beard. You make a swell-looking Viking."

Eric Redmond then introduced Tom to Helga, and Helga introduced Eric to Scarface and Theresa. All was smiles and glad reunion, until Bor-

ghild announced to the two newcomers her recent marriage to Scarface Jimmy, whereupon Tom Jones's brow clouded.

"Any more marriages been taking place around here?" he asked rather truculently in Norse, glaring at young Nils.

"Alas, no," replied the boy bishop, squarely meeting the other's glance, "but I believe that it can be arranged."

He, the Bishop of Greenland, was not going to be patronized by a mere foreigner!

Helga smoothed the situation over by expressing amazement at the resuscitation of her Eric's long-dead plane.

"We owe it all to our new ally here," explained Eric, indicating Tom Jones. "We were drilling for water near the plateau and struck 'oil' instead. Tom used his scientific knowledge to 'distil' the oil and made 'gasoline,' so here we are."

"Great work," ejaculated Scarface.

"But how did you find *us?*" asked Helga.

"Quite simply," replied her husband. "You doubtless know that the Miami got out of gas. Skraeling canoes towed her ashore, where we later captured her. All the Miami's crew escaped us except Charley Loy. The Skraeling rifle corps made good their retreat, with their rifles and ammunition. They are a decided menace. However, we have the Miami's machine guns. Altoonah is dead, as you may not know."

"We ought to know," said Scarface, and explained their adventure.

"YOU haven't yet told us how you found us," persisted Helga.

"As soon as we learned of your escape, from a Skraeling prisoner," explained her husband, "we assumed that you had been blown south in the storm, so we scoured the sea with dragon ships further south than Vikings had ever ventured before. But we found no trace of you. Not even any wreckage of Nils's ship, which fact encouraged us. So the moment this plane was reconditioned, Jones and I set out to skirt the entire shore of this new southern sea."

During all this conversation, the reptilian hens had gradually been edging nearer, so Tom Jones gave the motor a whir, and they all scattered again precipitately.

"We can take only one of you back with us now," announced Eric, "and that must be one of the ladies. You can choose between you. Then either Jones or I will make a couple of trips alone and bring the others back by twos. How are you off for provisions?"

The recently besieged party explained that they were starving, so while Tom taxied the plane around the clearing to keep the besieging beasts away, the rest dragged in the body of the dead rooster, and gathered a quantity of palm-hearts.

Meanwhile the three girls had decided that little Terry, being from the outside world and the youngest should be the first passenger.

When this was announced, Nils promptly objected.

"I won't have her leaving here with that Jones fellow!" he exclaimed.

Every one was surprised at this outburst. But, because he was their bishop, his wishes were respected. After some discussion, it was finally agreed that Tom, Nils, and Theresa were to fly to the plateau together, and then have Angus Selkirk bring back the plane.

The plane departed, and the besieging reptiles closed around the two married couples, Eric and Helga, Scarface and Borghild, in the stockade.

In due course of time, Angus Selkirk arrived with the plane again. Then Eric flew the two girls back, leaving Angus and Scarface alone in the fort.

But when Eric reached the plateau city, he found that the boy bishop, taking advantage of the absence of the two *yarls*, had thrown Tom Jones into prison, and was forcing his attentions onto Theresa, despite her growing objections. Eric remonstrated with him, but in vain.

Eric was very anxious to get Tom out of jail and conciliate him, for Tom was a tremendous scientific acquisition for the Viking civilization. So the *yarl* cleverly suggested that Tom, rather than he, fly back to the stockade, to get Angus and Scarface.

"Very well," agreed Nils, "and I hope he crashes."

To Eric's surprise, Tom gladly agreed to leave the plateau city; and during his absence, Nils appeared to be making great progress with Theresa. It seemed that she was piqued with the willingness with which Tom had left her.

Meanwhile, in the cabin far to the southward, Angus and Scarface were rapidly becoming acquainted. The Scotch *yarl* of the Vikings had harbored a sneaking admiration for the Chicago man, ever since that day in the assembly hall of the plateau city, when the latter, unarmed and a prisoner, had boldly faced his captors, and had dictated terms to them instead of suing for mercy.

The two men had much in common. They were by far the two most forceful characters of the whole civilized population of the underworld.

In due course, Tom Jones arrived with the plane, and the three men bade a last farewell to the little cabin. Then they started northward. But a storm drove them to the west, and finally forced them to land, and stake down their plane.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FATAL MAGNET.

WHEN the central sun shone forth again through the clouds, they started north once more.

They had been but a short time on the wing, when they saw far to the left of them a barren rocky desert, and beyond that an encampment of tents.

"Let's reconnoiter," suggested Angus. "That may be Nick Fratelli and his Skraelings. We have been unable to locate them ever since we routed them, and drove them south."

So the plane headed for the desolate valley.

But scarcely had they winged over its edge, when their motor started coughing and sputtering, and the plane seemed strangely nose-heavy.

"Not out of gas, I hope?" inquired Scarface anxiously.

Tom Jones cocked his ear, and listened intently.

"N-n-no," he replied judiciously. "The gauge shows nearly full, although that isn't any proof. It sounds like ignition trouble. It's as though the ignition were all right in itself, but were struggling against something that is trying to interfere with it."

The engines sputtered a few times more, and then stopped completely. Jones headed down, and made a pancake landing; but the plane did not bounce — it hit with a jar, and rolled along as if glued to earth.

As their ship came to a stop, they examined the gas tanks, which were almost full; then Tom and Angus went over the wiring, which seemed all right.

But when he brought out the pocket voltmeter to test the wiring, the little instrument behaved most queerly. It did not appear to be broken, and yet the needle registered a high voltage, without any current being connected up at all.

As they worked, they all kept hitching up their belts. They did it subconsciously, hardly noticing that they were doing so, until Scarface, who not being an electrical expert, wasn't so engrossed as the two others, remarked, "What the devil is the matter with my gat? It seems heavy as lead."

He took it from his holster, and immediately it was nearly wrenched from his hand by some invisible downward pull.

"Why, it weighs a ton!" he gasped, stooping to lay the weapon on the ground.

As the pistol neared the rocky floor of the valley it was jerked downward, and struck the ground with a click. Scarface tried to lift it again, but it stuck to the ground as though glued there. He found, however, that he could quite easily slide it along the surface.

Selkirk and Jones had knocked off work to watch the performance. Each took out his own gun, and went through the same experience. Their faces were wrapped in puzzled frowns. Then suddenly the light dawned on them.

"I have it!" exclaimed Tom. "Lodestone! This whole valley is made of lodestone, magnetic iron ore. That's what put our ignition out of kilter."

"If you're right," said Angus, "the only way we can ever get out of here is to wheel our plane out of this valley. The bank to the west looks less steep. Let's get going."

"How do you know which way is west?" asked Scarface.

"Because we were headed west when we crashed," explained the *yarl*.

"But how did you head west in the first place?" persisted the other.

"Gyroscopic compass."

"Oh, so you have one of those newfangled things, same as we did on the Miami. Well, let's go."

They started pushing the plane westward. It was an arduous task. Just merely pushing the plane wasn't so bad, but the floor of the valley was strewn with bowlders of all sizes, and was pitted with holes. Some of the smaller bowlders they could and did move out of their way. Some of the smaller pits they could and did fill with stones. But the larger bowlders and holes they had to go around; and often, after making considerable progress, they would reach an impasse and have to back up and lose all that they had gained. This was most discouraging.

THE place was weird and oppressive. On all sides stretched the bare magnetic ore. The many pits in its surface gave it a lunar appearance. There was no soil, and hence no plant life. There were no animals, not even any insects. Of course there were no birds, for birds are not found that far south within the earth. Even the winged lizards gave the place a wide berth. Was it some sixth sense, unpossessed by humans, that enabled the pterodactyls and insects to feel the magnetic emanations, or was it merely the desolation that drove them away?

The heat was intense. The central

sun beat pitilessly down. The metallic rocks absorbed the heat until they were like the top of a stove. The air trembled and writhed as it rose from the hot surface, distorting the shape of the surrounding hills. But luckily this very rising of the air sucked in cooler air from all sides, and thus created a slight breeze, which was all that made the awful valley bearable.

Even so, the three men quickly stripped off practically all of their already scant primitive garments, except their sandals, and stowed the discarded clothes in the cockpit. The pistol-belts had long since been removed, because of the magnetic weight of the pistols.

"This is worse than Death Valley!" exclaimed Tom.

"It is that!" assented Angus, puffing from his exertions.

"Never been there, but I can well believe it," added Jimmy.

The sweat poured down their muscular bodies, as they struggled on. So intent were they on their work that they didn't notice anything particular going on around them, until a rifle cracked ahead of them. At the same instant a splinter flew from one of the struts of the plane, striking Angus in the cheek.

"Duck!" he cried, and plunged behind a nearby bowlder.

But the others needed no command. Scarface, from long experience, had automatically taken to cover almost before the shot reached them, and Tom Jones was quick to follow suit.

"It's Nick the Rat, and his Skraelings!" exclaimed Scarface grimly. "And all our guns are in the airplane. Curse the luck!"

"The top of the cliff wabbles in this heated air so badly that I can hardly see what's there," replied Angus, "but I guess it's them all right."

"Lucky for you it does, old man," asserted Tom. "If it hadn't been as hard for them to see us, as it is for us to see them, you'd have been hit."

"How'll we get our guns?" asked Angus. "I don't fancy standing up again and being potted. And we can't reach the cockpit without standing up."

"I tell you," announced Tom. "First, do you think they know how many of us there are?"

"I doubt it," replied Angus. "We've kept pretty close to the plane all the time, so that our outlines, in this wiggly heat, must have blended into it pretty well."

"Then suppose you and Jimmy start off south as conspicuously as possible, as though you were trying to escape. Draw their fire from time to time by standing up when running from cover to cover."

"Sounds like a book," interrupted Scarface, grinning.

"Well, then, let's hope they read it wrong," replied Angus.

"Nick never was much of a hand at reading," added Scarface. "Go on, Tom. What's the rest of your plan?"

The boy made a gesture of impatience at all this levity.

"When you get quite a way from the ship," he continued, "I shall try to sneak into the cockpit and get our guns. Then you can crawl back, really keeping under cover, and we shall be armed to defend ourselves."

"Come on then," agreed Angus.

"It's jake with me," confirmed Scarface.

Suddenly arising to his feet, he sped southward across the meteoric floor of the valley. A perfect volley of shots resulted from the cliff to the west. He dropped behind a bowlder.

"Are you all right?" called Angus.

"Never touched me," came back the cheery reply.

This interchange of shouts brought several more shots from the enemy, some directed at Scarface's bowlder and some at the plane.

Tom whispered to Angus. "This shows that there mustn't be any hollering back and forth after you get away from here. The acoustics are too good."

"Glad there's something that's good about this infernal place. Well, here I go. Watch me!"

And, amid another volley of shots, he dashed across the open, and joined Jimmy.

From then on, the two were a bit more cautious, and yet they made certain, each time they moved, to be conspicuous enough to draw fire.

Draw fire they did, and even had one or two very narrow escapes, in spite of the waviness of the atmosphere.

WHEN they were well on their way, Tom sneaked carefully around to the end of the tail. No shots resulted. Quite evidently he had not been seen. He stood up by the rudder. Now he could see the cliff-top, but they did not see him. His figure must have blended with that of the ship, for no bullets came his way.

The firing continued, and at every shot, Tom would jerk nervously; but the bullets were apparently directed at his two companions.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he crawled up over the elevators, and then wormed his way along the top of the tail, until he dropped into the cockpit with a gasp of relief.

Scarface and Angus were still dodging from rock to rock, inviting potshots, but no one had yet noticed Tom's maneuver. One by one, he took out the precious rifles, and lowered them slowly over the side with a loop of rope. Quite a job, on account of the magnetic attraction. But he accomplished it without any tell-tale clatter.

The three pistol belts followed, with equal success.

Just as he was about to crawl back along the tail again, the thought suddenly occurred to him, "Why all the precautions now? I've got the firearms out. Why not jump, and run for a rock?"

But then he decided that the less the enemy knew, the better, even if he couldn't see any particular harm in giving them any particular bit of information. So back along the tail he crawled.

Halfway there he slipped. Groping quickly for a handhold threw him still further off his balance, and he slid clattering off the plane, to land with a thud on the metallic ground beneath.

A volley of shots spattered about the plane.

"Are you all right, Tom?" shouted Scarface and Angus in unison.

But poor Tom made no reply.

"Stay here!" exclaimed Scarface to Angus. "No need of both of us getting bumped off."

So saying, he sprang up from the rock behind which he was taking cover, and raced across the open toward where Tom lay motionless on the ground by the tail of the plane.

Meanwhile Angus started crawling cautiously back toward the plane.

The element of surprise in Scarface's dash was probably all that saved him from annihilation. He was halfway to his goal before the enemy opened fire, and he reached it without mishap, dropping beside Tom.

Angus did not dare to shout and ask if Scarface were hit, for that would reveal his own whereabouts. Nor did Scarface dare shout to reassure him. So both kept quiet, and Angus continued his crawl.

There was not much cover where the two lay by the plane, so Scarface, after catching his breath, dragged Tom's body behind a near-by bowlder. This brought another volley; but no casualties. Then he searched the body for bullet wounds; but none were evident. He placed his ear on the other's chest; the heart still beat. Tom was only stunned.

THERE was no water to throw in his face to revive him. The heat was intense; even Scarface was reeling with it. However, he chafed the other's wrists and ankles, and finally brought him round.

"Where am I?" asked Tom, sitting up weakly.

"In Death Valley, still," replied Scarface grimly. "How do you feel?"

"Hot as hell," replied Jones, "but otherwise okeh."

Just then Angus joined them.

After inquiring for the health of both of them, he said: "I've an idea. Your friend Nick and his Skraelings never fired at me once on my way back here. If I can crawl in one direction without being seen, I can crawl in the other. So can one of you. Let's two of us crawl in opposite directions to the cliff, get up over the edge somehow, take cover on the top, flank them, and open fire. Try to pot Nick. If we succeed, the leaderless natives will run.

"The one of us who stays at the plane—and I think it had better be Jones, because he's still a bit weak—can crawl back and forth from rock to rock near by here, and fire an occasional shot from different spots, to make them think we are all still here. What do you say?"

It was an unusually long speech for the taciturn Scot. He never spoke without thinking, but this plan he had carefully thought out.

Scarface approved at once. Tom demurred at playing the least dangerous part on the program, but finally yielded to the insistence of the two others. To mollify him, they permitted him to sneak out and drag in the firearms.

They had completely forgotten the magnetic nature of their surroundings. But when they came to pick up their rifles and automatics, preparatory to setting forth, the lodestone was brought forcibly to their attention again.

"How the devil are we going to carry several tons of firearms with us?" exclaimed Scarface, exasperated.

"We've just got to, that's all," sighed Angus.

So they started out, one to the right, and the other to the left, dragging their guns with difficulty, while Tom crawled from bowlder to bowlder around the plane, firing from time to time at the cliff. At first he planned to fire from three different locations, thus simulating the three of them; but then it occurred to him that, if he used six or eight locations, he might be able to give the impression that the plane had carried quite a large force.

Unfortunately he overdid it. Nick had become quite certain that there were only three men confronting him, but he had been too cowardly to make a direct attack on even only three. He saw through Tom's ruse at once. In fact he got a glimpse of Tom on one of his crawls, and nearly potted him.

And then he searched for and located the other two.

Tom Jones sat behind a bowlder and bandaged a bad nick in his left upper arm. If it hadn't been for the wavy atmosphere they might have got him that time. Several more shots rang out, but no bullets spattered near. Far to one side he could see Scarface lying low, behind a rock; he must be their target now.

Tom turned to look at Angus, who was just then worming his way out from behind some cover. Another fusillade from the cliff top, and then Angus leaped in the air with a yell of pain and collapsed behind a bowlder.

Tom heard a cheer in front of him, and peering out from behind his protecting rock, he saw the Skraelings charging down over the face of the bank, brandishing their rifles as they came.

Coolly steadying his heavy and unwieldy piece on the rock before him, Tom opened fire on the oncoming enemy. Far to one side, Scarface Boston Jimmy did the same.

But as the Skraelings reached the bottom of the bank, a surprising thing happened. Their rifles were snatched from their hands by some unseen force, and fell clattering to the ground.

Several of them bolted back up the face of the bank. Several more fell before the bullets of the lone two who were opposing them. The rest stooped to pick up their fallen weapons again, and found to their horror that the rifles had suddenly and inexplicably become so heavy that they could scarcely be budged.

AS the Skraeling horde paused irresolute at the foot of the cliff, with their leaders urging them on, although almost as astonished as they, the motionless central sun was darkened by a cloud. And then the rain fell in torrents.

Each crowd was blotted from the other's sight by the descending deluge. All was dark as night, the only night ever known to this central world, the night of a tropical tempest.

The thunder roared like an artillery barrage. The lightning flashed almost continually, and yet did not serve to illumine the scene appreciably, so thick was the falling rain.

Neither Tom Jones nor Scarface Jimmy sought shelter from the downpour. So parched and feverish were they from the sweltering heat of the awful valley that they both welcomed the refreshing rain. It soothed and cooled them, in spite of its driving force. They scooped up and drank the water which collected in hollows in the rocky floor of the valley. They were filled with renewed life and pep.

But not so the enemy. The Skraelings had been living in comfort in the jungle near by, and were in no need of cooling water. To them, the cloudburst was merely another calamity added to the ghostly snatching of their rifles, and the inexplicable weight which those weapons had suddenly acquired.

So when the storm finally lifted, Tom and Scarface were all set to renew the fray, with rifles propped against sheltering bowlders, whereas the majority of the Skraelings were frantically scrambling up the slippery side of the cañon, their firearms for the most part abandoned at the bottom.

The rain had cleared the air and cooled the rocks. No longer did the valley glow with unbearable furnace heat. No longer did rising heat waves distort the appearance of all objects into wiggly lines. Everything looked

clear and normal; and as soon as the last drop had fallen, and the light of the red central sun again showed through the scurrying clouds, the two young Americans began to pick off the scrambling Skraelings one by one with unerring accuracy. Almost every shot told.

Among the naked savages, certain leaders could be seen urging them to return to the attack. At these leaders, therefore, the two marksmen directed their first shots, and soon had the satisfaction of eliminating every one of them. But, because these leaders were clothed—or rather unclothed—exactly like their followers, it was impossible to make out which, if any, of them was the hated Nick Fratelli. For Nick, with his World War experience, had had the sense not to garb himself in Viking armor, as had been the custom among the Skraeling chiefs who had preceded him. Thus he saved himself from becoming the conspicuous target that he otherwise would have been.

Nor could the two marksmen tell whether the enemy leaders whom they had brought down had been hit, or merely had been driven to take cover.

The now leaderless Skraelings abandoned their futile attempt to scale the slippery cliff. Some took cover at the foot, but by far the larger part of their number turned and fled precipitately southward around the interior edge of the valley. Many lay dead or dying.

Scarface signaled to Tom, and the two at once began a steady crawl from rock to rock, converging toward the enemy position, their common idea being to gain possession of the deserted rifles, before the Skraelings could recover sufficient morale to attack them again in force. For even the remaining handful of the enemy would be more than a match for the two Americans, if only the Skraelings would get together again and act with courage.

But apparently a very similar idea had occurred to some of those on the other side, for as Scarface Jimmy was crawling cautiously around a large rock about halfway to the foot of the cliff, he almost bumped his head against that of Nick the Rat.

Instantly the two men staggered to their feet, and raised their rifles to fire. But they had forgotten the magnetic pull of the lodestone ground, which resisted this movement. The rifles stayed down, and nearly upset both men in their efforts to lift them so precipitately.

SCARFACE was the first to size up the situation. Letting go his rifle, which rushed with a clatter to the rocky floor, he grabbed for his automatic. But his opponent, instantly sensing the movement, flung himself upon him. Grappling, the two went down.

The clatter of Jimmy's rifle, as it fell, attracted the attention of Tom Jones. Raising his own rifle and resting its great weight upon a rock, he drew a careful bead upon the struggling pair, and calmly waited for an opportunity to fire at the Italian without endangering his friend.

At last the opportunity offered. Tom gave a rapid but steady squeeze on the trigger. But just as the firing-pin clicked into place, and the shot roared forth, a heavy form flung itself from behind upon the unsuspecting Tom. The bullet struck harmlessly just to one side of the wrestlers.

Tom tried to wrench his gun around toward his assailant, but the magnetic pull prevented thus sudden a movement, so he turned and swung his fist at the man who was grappling with

him. The man staggered back, and Tom sprang to his feet and faced him.

It was Cicero Tony Schultz!

For a moment they confronted each other glaring. Then, as if suddenly inspired by a common thought, each drew his automatic and fired.

But both entirely failed to take into account that fatal magnetic pull. Even Billy the Kid in his palmiest days couldn't have been "quick on the draw" with a hundred-pound six-gun.

Before firing a second time, each clapped his left hand beneath his right hand and lifted with all his force.

It was a cold-blooded performance, standing there within a few paces of each other, each with both feet firmly braced, and both hands employed in trying to lift a massive piece of ordnance—about four inches long—into position to annihilate the other.

Both fired simultaneously, and Tom Jones dropped his gun with a cry. His right arm hung limp.

Cicero still held his heavy gun in both hands, steadying it to fire again. He stepped backward several paces. Tom stood for a moment, bewildered by his wound; then flung himself on his enemy.

Tom realized that he was leaping to his death, but it was his one and only chance. Some trick of fate might stay the bullet of the Dutchman until Tom could reach him and strike him with his intact left fist. His right arm was useless.

The imminence of death speeded Jones's perceptions to an unbelievable degree. Just as the whole past life of a drowning man is supposed to flash before his eyes as he goes down, so time was distorted for Tom Jones during the brief instant in which he sprang across the space which separated him from Cicero Tony.

So stimulated was his mind, that it seemed as though he were taking part in a slow-motion picture. He saw, as in a nightmare, the other man swing the muzzle of the automatic steadily toward his heart.

A sneer played over the features of his executioner. Cicero wanted to be so very sure that his aim was true, before he pulled the trigger.

Then came a flash and a roar! But Tom felt no pain, no stunning blow. And yet it could not be that the other had missed at that short distance.

As the two crashed to the ground together, Tom's mind, still working with lightning-like speed, recalled the stories he had read of the Moros of the Philippines, who, although shot through the heart at fifty yards by American soldiers, would still keep on coming, and would bury their curved knives in the vitals of their slayers.

But it was to meet just that situation that the forty-fives had been invented. A forty-five would not only *kill* at fifty paces, but the impact of its bullet would stop a man in his tracks and drop him at the very spot where he was when hit. And Cicero was armed with a forty-five! Why then had Tom been able to keep on?

With this thought flashing through his mind, Tom's left hand clutched his enemy's throat.

But a calm voice behind him said, "Lay off him, Tom, he's dead."

And Angus Selkirk leaned down and pulled the youth off his victim.

Bewildered, Tom staggered to his feet and looked around. Angus stood beside him, an automatic in one hand.

"But I was killed!" exclaimed Jones inanely, not yet realizing that it was Selkirk's shot which he had heard, and that Cicero had delayed his trigger-finger an instant too long.

"About the way I was," replied the Scot grinning, "until the rain brought me out of it, just in time...Say, see what's going on over there." Tom turned.

JIMMY and his former lieutenant were confronting each other with clenched fists.

"You're facing the middleweight champion of Chicago," taunted Nick, "and you've made the last wise-crack about me that you're ever going to make. Come on and take your medicine!"

Scarface saved his breath, and drove at the other's chest with his right fist. The Italian gave way a step, and lunged straight at Jimmy's face. But Jimmy swayed a bit to one side, tilted his head a bit further, and then drove square at Nick's oncoming chin.

The impact threw the Italian off his balance. Up went both hands to steady himself. He was completely unguarded.

Jimmy was too eager to take advantage of the situation. He swung viciously—and missed! He fanned the air as his feet skidded on the rain-wet rocks.

But so did Nick's. The two men toppled over together.

Jimmy, catlike, was on his feet again in an instant, but his opponent lay stunned. Out flashed Jimmy's automatic from beneath his left armpit, but was nearly wrenched from the hand that held it by the tremendous pull of the magnetic rocks.

"Stop!" thundered Angus. "Take him alive! The Althing—the council—will deal with him."

So Scarface grabbed his gun in both hands and stood over the prostrate figure, ready and waiting for any hostile move.

But none came. Nick's body lay limp and still.

Tom and Angus hurried over; and while the two others stood guard, Tom dropped to his knees and put his head to the fallen man's chest. Not a sound. He pulled the body to one side, and the head wabbled loosely and disconnectedly.

"Neck broken," asserted Scarface. Then, with a bit of his old-time Napoleonic braggadocio, "*Sic semper* Fratelli."

"Why, you're using your right arm!" exclaimed Angus to Tom.

"So I am," replied Tom, in surprise.

Then, raising it he inspected it carefully for signs of a wound. Blood was dripping from the elbow.

"I guess it nicked my crazy-bone, that's all," said he.

A shot from the cliff startled them. Instantly the three dropped to cover. Then they peered cautiously out.

From behind a bowlder by the foot of the cliff there projected a Skraeling rifle.

Angus carefully drew a bead, and fired. The bullet almost nicked the other's gun, but did no harm to the Skraeling himself.

"He'll keep his head down for a while now," remarked Scarface Jimmy grimly.

Tom Jones picked up a small round piece of lodestone about the size of a baseball.

"What we need," said he, "is mortar-fire."

Whereupon he heaved the rock at the hiding enemy. It described a graceful parabola, and landed neatly on the Skraeling's rifle, as Tom had known it would. His two companions followed suit.

There came a howl of surprise and pain, and then not one Skraeling, but

rather four, leaped from their cover and bolted south.

The three Americans watched them go. The fleeing men had left their rifles behind, and were not worth firing at. They ran for a hundred yards or so, until they came to a low and rather gently sloping part of the bank, up which they scrambled, and soon disappeared into the jungle beyond.

"That's just the place to roll out our airplane!" exclaimed Angus. "Come on."

The tropical central sun was now beating down on them again with full force. The cloud remnants of the recent storm had long since departed. The rain-water in the pitted holes of the magnetic valley was steaming skyward. The air was becoming insufferably hot again.

"First we must bury poor old Nick," asserted Scarface.

"Bury *him!*" exclaimed Angus in disgust. "Let's feed him to the hyænodonts!"

But Scarface emphatically shook his head.

Said he, "Nick the Rat was my partner and my pal and my right-hand man for years. You two have known him only at his worst. But I remember him as he was before Cicero Schultz poisoned his mind. For old times' sake, I am going to bury him."

"But we have no shovels," objected Tom.

"And the jungle beasts will dig him up anyhow," added Angus. "That's why we always sail our Viking dead out to sea, on a burning raft or ship."

"Then let's bury him here in Death Valley, where the beasts never come," suggested Jimmy.

So together the three men rolled the body into the deepest hole in the metallic surface of the valley's floor, and then piled the hole full of rocks, on top of the body.

Similar burial they gave to Cicero Tony Schultz, not out of any love or respect, nor even for old times' sake, but merely because, after all, he had been an American like themselves.

AMID sweltering heat, they proceeded to roll their crippled aircraft to the low spot in the cliff. But they could not get her up the incline. It was too muddy and too steep.

So they dragged out the rifles—some job, with the magnetic rocks trying to pull them back—and made camp to await the drying of the incline.

Some small game was shot, and rain-water was fetched from the valley. Then they slept for uncounted hours. Time meant nothing in this land of the central sun.

They had a strange awakening. From some bushes a little way inland from the cliff-top, there appeared two long swan-like necks, each topped by a reptilian head.

"Great Scott, what a snake!" exclaimed Tom.

"I don't blame you for thinking so," said Angus, "but those are dobrats."

"What?" asked Tom.

"Dobrats."

"And what are dobrats?"

"A kind of prehistoric reptile. I think the scientists call them iguanodons."

At just that moment the two beasts waddled out into the open, directly toward the camp. They stood about fifteen feet high. Their hindquarters were heavy, their tails and hind legs muscular, their shoulders narrow, and their fore legs puny. The general effect was like kangaroos except that these reptiles walked rather than hopped.

Tom and Jimmy sprang to their feet and snatched up their rifles. The beasts saw them, but appeared to be neither enraged nor frightened.

"Don't shoot!" admonished Angus. "They're perfectly harmless. Not much good to eat, but their eggs are delicious."

"Fancy eating dinosaur eggs!" exclaimed Tom, laying down his rifle and studying the two creatures. "Wouldn't Ray Chapman Andrews be thrilled!"

The dobrats stopped at a tall bush quite near the men's camp, and started browsing off the top leaves. But suddenly they ceased their feeding, and became alert, gazing this way and that with evident apprehension. And then, without warning, a third beast, very similar to the other two except that its head was larger and its neck shorter and more sturdy, charged out of the woods with a roar. The dobrats scattered.

"A man-eater!" cried Angus.

The three men promptly raced for a near-by tree, and boosted and hauled each other up into its branches. When they were safely ensconced thirty feet or so above the ground, they looked down. The tyrannosaurus, or allosaur, or whatever it was, was perched on the back of one of the dobrats, and had borne it to the ground. The captor's jaws were clamped about its victim's neck.

With a wrench, the head was severed. Then the huge carnivore began to feast on its victim. At various spots in the distant sky several small black specks appeared, and rapidly converged, growing larger as they came. They were winged lizards the size of crows, the buzzards of that prehistoric world. On their arival, they perched on near-by trees, awaiting their turn at the feast.

One of these pterosaurs, becoming a bit impatient for its share of the carcass of the dobrat, circled the feasting beast; but a sudden lift of the latter's head and a snap from its jaws, and the little bat-like creature dropped crushed and quivering to the ground. With a growl, the huge beast resumed its eating, tearing great pieces of flesh from the body of its kill, and gulping them down without chewing.

The three men watched, fascinated.

NOW the surrounding underbrush began to rustle and shake with the motion of unseen forms, one of which finally emerged. It was a long and narrow beast, with high arched back, covered with horny plates. Its legs were stocky, its head abnormally small. But its most remarkable feature was the bunch of spikes, like a Viking war-club, in which its tail terminated.

"A stegosaurus, I'll bet!" exclaimed Tom.

Whatever it was, it cautiously and tentatively approached the carcass. The feasting reptile raised its head and growled. But the spiked one, unheeding, snatched a piece of meat. At that, the killer of the carcass sprang suddenly on the other's back. But he could not get either his claws or his teeth through the heavy armor-plates. And then the clubbed tail was brought into play, until finally the original attacker was driven off.

The other, also somewhat mauled, in spite of its armor, retired into the bushes. The feaster returned to gorge undisturbed.

Tom and Scarface had brought their rifles with them in their flight. Scarface now drew a careful bead on the huge prehistoric reptile, and fired. The bullet struck the creature's head. But

the beast merely scratched fumblingly at the place with one forepaw for a moment, as though annoyed by an insect, and then resumed eating.

Said Tom, "That huge head has probably only a spoonful of brains. It will take a better shot than that, to reach a vital spot."

So they didn't fire again.

At last the beast satisfied his appetite and waddled off. The bat-winged lizards flapped down from the tree-tops and perched on what was left of the poor dobrat. Smaller reptiles emerged from the bushes, and contested for the remains. The three men clambered out of the tree, picked up their camp, and hastened down into the valley to their plane.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONSPIRACY.

"THIS is no place for us!" exclaimed Angus, pointing out the obvious.

"But we can't move our ship without a block-and-tackle," objected Tom, "and we haven't one."

"We have plenty of rope, though," contributed Jimmy, "and we can whittle out pulleys if we have to."

"Take too long," objected Angus. "We've got to get out of here. A winch would be easier than pulleys."

"Let's make a winch then," suggested Tom. "Come on."

Under his guidance, they cut down a tree about eight inches thick, and cut off a log about six feet long, with three pieces of branch projecting at almost right angles from one end.

Just beyond the top of the incline, up which they had been trying to push the airplane, there stood two trees five feet apart. From these trees the men trimmed all the low branches, except one on each, projecting away from the valley at a height of about four feet above the ground.

Into the crotches thus formed, they lifted their log. The rope, hitched to the bow of the plane, was secured to this log. Then they took turns, two of them at the handles of the winch thus formed, while the third chocked the wheels of the plane to keep it from sliding back.

It was hard work, but the plane actually moved, and soon was out of the awful magnetic valley. To their delight, they found that the motor functioned perfectly again, now that it was beyond the influence of the lodestones.

Some further time was consumed in wheeling the craft, with assistance from its whirling propellers, until they finally jockeyed it into an open space large enough for a take-off.

But before they left, they carried off all the Skraeling rifles, forty-three in number, cached them beside a large rock in the jungle, where they could easily be found again. For the rifles would have been too heavy a load for their plane to carry, in addition to the three men.

The reptiles and the little *skwaas* were just picking the last shreds of meat from the white bones of the dobrat, as the three men soared up and away to the northward once more.

The rest of the flight home was uneventful, and soon they landed, amid stirred-up clouds of red pollen, in the fields which flanked the plateau of the Viking city.

Great was the rejoicing at their return, for they had delayed so long *en route* that every one had begun to worry about them. And even greater was the rejoicing, when it was learned that Nick Fratelli and Cicero Tony

Schultz would menace them no more. The power of the enemy was broken forever. Leaderless and nearly weaponless, they had now been driven further from the Viking strongholds than ever before.

During their absence, Nils, the boy bishop, had dug up the body of Captain Ferreira and had given it a stupendous flaming Viking burial at sea, in an endeavor to make an impression on little Terry. The girl did seem impressed, and Nils appeared to have made so much progress with her that he scorned to make any hostile move toward Tom on the latter's return.

Terry had suppressed her anxiety at Tom's long delay, and now Tom made no effort to see her, much as he desired to. Poor chap! The loving reunion of Jimmy with Borghild, and Angus with Astrid, made him lonely.

After a rest, he and Angus each took one trip back to bring in the rifles, while preparations were made on the plateau for a big celebration of their final victory over the Skraelings.

GREAT preparations were made for the celebration of the Skraelings' downfall. A huge banquet was held in the assembly hall. Theresa Ferreira occupied the place of honor at the right hand of Bishop Nils. Almost every one regarded them as practically betrothed.

Upon Scarface, Nils bestowed the rank of *yarl*. Tom Jones, Mike Murphy, Little Arty, and even Charley Loy were k n i g h t e d. Otho the Silver-tongued, *yarl* of a distant city, sang a saga, especially composed for the occasion, in which he recounted, madly garbled, the cruise of the Miami, and the other adventures of the new Yarl Fee-ess-med-air, which is Norse for "Scarface."

Speeches were made, in the boisterous language of the Vikings, by Nils and Eric and Angus. And then the bishop called on Scarface Boston Jimmy for a few remarks.

The new *yarl* thanked them for the honor which they had bestowed upon him, and expressed his appreciation of having had the opportunity of battling side by side with them against the common enemy, and his regret at ever having conspired against them.

"And now," he concluded in broken Norse, "you doubtless wish to know where I plan to settle, for as a true Viking I assume that you will give me no lands, but rather will send me forth to conquer my own yarldom.

"Two hundred miles to the northeastward, where your glider first sighted us when we invaded the center of the earth, there is a peninsula which I surveyed from a mountain top. At that time it appealed to me. I visioned it netted with roads and dotted with teeming cities. I stamped my foot on the summit, and took possession in my own name. The surrounding country seemed uninhabited, even by Skraelings. The general appearance is more like the outer earth than these lands here to the southward. So if you will give me men and barges, I will go and colonize that peninsula, and establish there my yarldom."

His Borghild beamed with pride.

He struck his sword on the rough board table, for he was garbed as a Viking of the Vikings, and shouted, "Who will volunteer to sail in the fleet of James Lefavour?"

"I will!" cried Tom Jones, springing to his feet.

"And so will I," cried Little Arty.

"And I," added Mike Murphy.

"And I. And I. And I," chimed in Vikings from all over the hall.

Bishop Nils smiled with approval, and pressed Theresa's hand. His rival, Tom Jones, had been the first to volunteer in this new adventure, from which he might never return.

When the commotion was over Tom obtained the floor and suggested that, after the next sleep, he and Scarface should fly up to the new yarldom to reconnoiter. And the bishop smiled again, and hastened to approve.

The next morning quite a crowd came down to see them off. Eric and his wife Helga. Angus and his wife Astrid. Borghild to bid godspeed to her Yimmy. Nils and Theresa, arm in arm, the boy bishop anxious to show off his conquest, and to triumph over Tom to the very last.

Tom had brought a large bundle of his belongings. And Borghild, smiling slyly, also brought a large bundle, ostensibly for Jimmy. These were stowed into the cockpit of the plane.

The motor was started, the skids were removed, and Tom settled into the driver's seat.

Then Scarface stepped off to the edge of the crowd for a fond farewell embrace of Borghild.

At the same moment Helga and Astrid drew Nils one side.

"Let go of Theresa for a moment, if you can," they cajoled him. "We have an important secret for you—it concerns her."

Then, as they led him away from the crowd, the airplane motor gave an impatient roar behind them, as they bent near to whisper in his ear.

"I can't hear a word you say," exclaimed Nils a bit testily. "You'll have to speak a little louder."

"All right!" they shouted. "What we wanted to tell you was that Theresa's replacing Scarface and is eloping with Tom Jones in the plane!"

Nils wheeled.

The crowd was scattering as the plane soared from the field, sending up a cloud of red pollen. Then it sped away to the northward, with Tom and his eloping bride waving good-by to those below.

THE elopers adjusted to their ears the phones installed long ago by Eric and Angus to make conversation possible above the roar of the motors. As the plateau city gradually faded behind them in the distance, Tom suggested:

"Let's land somewhere and have a real talk at last, dear."

So the amphibian plane volplaned down to the water, and then taxied up to the beach of a little island. Tom clambered out of the cockpit, and assisted the erstwhile tomboy to alight, which she did shyly, blushing.

The two sat down on the sand, nestling in each other's arms. Tom broke the silence to ask humbly, "How did you happen to pick me, when you could have become queen of all the center of the earth by marrying Nils Uppri? Is it just because you wouldn't marry a priest?"

"No," she replied, "I got over that idea long ago, for bishops are different down here, more like kings or congressmen or something, than like the bishops of my church. I don't know just why I didn't fall for Nils. We got along fine together in our log fort."

Tom glowered, but Theresa leaned over and kissed him, until he smiled again.

"You know, it's a funny thing," said she. "At first, I thought I cared for Nils; but after a while every time he would kiss me and put his arms around me, I'd shut my eyes and make believe it was you."

"I'd rather do it myself," interjected Tom, suiting the action to the word.

How these two flew out through the polar orifice of the earth, and down over the continent of Greenland in the dead darkness of polar winter, finally to crash off the coast of Nova Scotia, would take too long to tell. Suffice it to state that they lived through their hardships, reached Boston, and were duly married by a cardinal in person.

From them I learned this story, for they looked me up because of my having written up the earlier adventures of Eric and Angus.

They are now as happy as I would wish for them. The fly in the ointment is that none of Tom's Back Bay friends will believe his story of Chicago gangsters, the frozen north, and the land beyond the pole. They claim, these bluestockings, that it is all a mere yarn to cover up the bald fact that Tom has gone and married a little gutter-snipe whom he picked up somehow during the summer—this in spite of the fact that the girl is rapidly developing into as fine a lady as one would care to know.

But they love each other devotedly, and may eventually live down the suspicions of his friends.

Incidentally, the little old ex-jockey, named Arty, was let onto the secret of their intended flight, and sent out a message by them. He wants the Sydney broadcasting station to use the Rogers underground aërial occasionally, so that he can try to tune in on them. Australian papers please copy.

THE END.

Brigands of the Balkans

IN the shadow of the Balkans brigandage is a recognized profession, and each village has its own resident brigand chief, who, for a certain sum paid to him annually, undertakes to protect it from other brigands. At the same time he also levies a tax on every woman who marries, the sum demanded varying with the ability of her father or prospective husband to pay. In default of payment unpleasant things begin to happen to both families: sheepskin coats are stolen, the ox is hamstrung, the cultivated fields are laid waste in the night, and frequently the bride herself is carried off.

The village of Mavros, for example, had as many as seven of these parasitic protectors at one time, to whom it paid dues as the price of peace and good will. While the brigands are supposed to belong to the mountains, in reality they spend most of their time in the villages, and many of them rent or own houses and land. Fierce, showy, swaggering fellows, they attend the rural festivities and welcome or otherwise invite themselves to every fireside. As the local *gendarmerie* is largely composed of ex-brigands, there is no hope of help from them.

Once in awhile the brigands rob and murder a wealthy traveler or carry him off for ransom, and if he is rich and therefore influential, the government sends troops to get them. But immediately after such a raid the band retires to the mountains, where, among the narrow defiles and winding passes, they can pick off the soldiers from the lofty crags above, while remaining themselves unseen.

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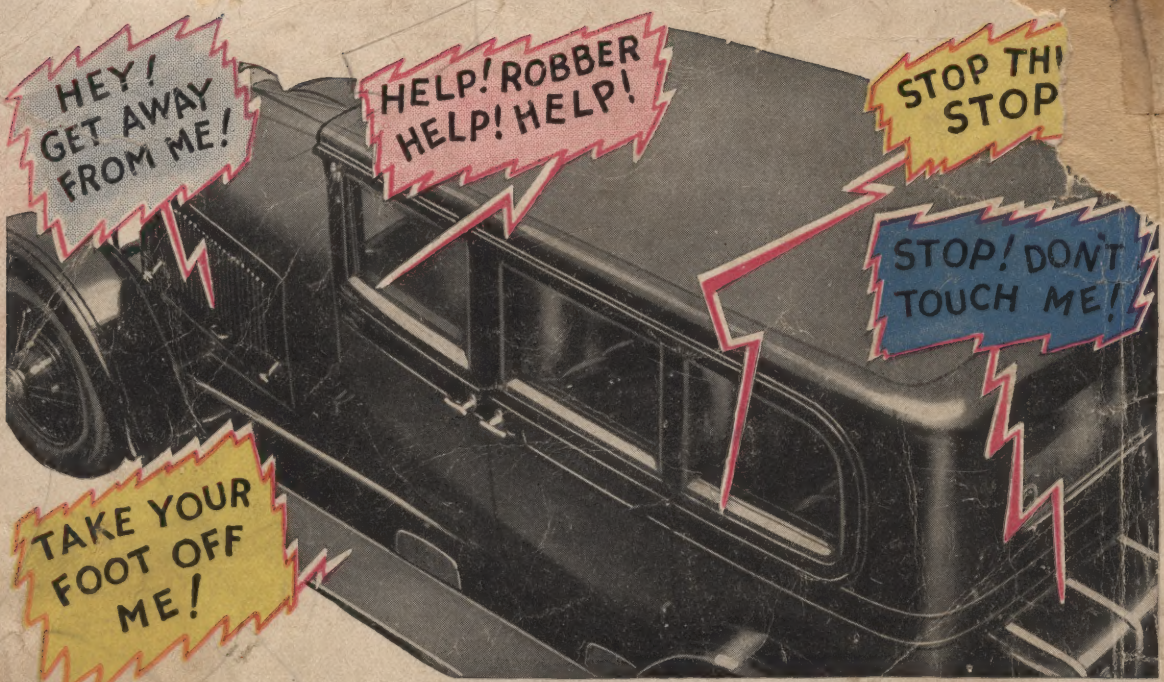
Why don't you write?



Astonishing Electrical Invention

Protects Your Car from Thieves

...Automatically!

This unquestionably is the queerest, most incredible invention since the first discoveries of radio! A magical, shouting, automatic watchman that actually is far more than human! Never sleeps, rests or gets tired! Stands guard over your entire car from spare tire to headlights and steering wheel! Endorsed by police! Approved by Motor Associations! Now offered on generous 5-day test basis! The coupon brings full details.

A Startling Uncanny Money Maker For Agents

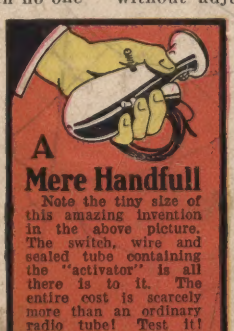
"WHAT makes it work?" "Where on earth did you get it?" "Bet you five dollars he's got some one hiding in there!" "It simply can't be true." A running fire of comment like this breaks out whenever and wherever this new invention is exhibited. And why not? When no one ever heard of such a startling, uncanny device before! In fact few people would even dare to dream there could be such a thing! So this, men, is something really NEW, something to grip the imagination of everyone, something that sells to every autoist on sheer novelty alone. Distributors, "star" salesmen, every man who wants to double and triple his present income should note carefully the following facts.

The Secret Of A Theft-Proof Car

Now in this amazing new way, every car can be protected from theft for 24 full hours a day. In the garage or parked on the street, if any thief so much as pulls at your spare tire or touches his foot to your running board —ZOWIE! A riot of noise starts instantly! And your car never shuts up till the thief leaves. And listen to this. Even if the thief is wise to what's up, you alone place the secret control button anywhere you want it around the car. The thief can't possibly find it. If he wastes time looking for it—Bingo! He's caught and on his way to jail! This astonishing invention guards your spare-tire, head-lights and spot-lights as well as the car itself.

Installed In 10 Minutes—Costs Nothing To Operate

The inventor has asked the U. S. Government to protect his patent rights on this revolutionary discovery. Because of its uncanny powers and to distinguish it from everything else on earth this queer discovery is now called "Devil Dog." Among its amazing features is the fact that it can be installed by anyone in 10 minutes or less. There is absolutely no cost for operation. It will last as long as the car. Fits any car from Ford to Rolls Royce without adjustment or fussing.



A Mere Handfull

Note the tiny size of this amazing invention in the above picture. The switch, wire and sealed tube containing the "activator" is all there is to it. The entire cost is scarcely more than an ordinary radio tube! Test it! Mail the coupon today.

For introductory purposes a special 5-day test offer is now being made. If you are interested in learning about the most astonishing invention since the radio first came in, use the coupon at once. If your present income is less than $50 a week, the profit possibilities as our agent may astonish you. The coupon brings details of all offers. Mail it now.

NORTHWEST ELECTRIC CORP.
Dept. C-210,
Pukwana, So. Dakota

AUTOMATIC DEVIL DOG

Northwest Electric Corp.,
Dept. C-210,
Pukwana, So. Dakota.
Rush details of your big 5-day test offer and big profits for agents.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

☐ Check here if interested only in one for your own car and not in agents' money-making offer.